

# COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

Strong Press, Strong Democracy

## Do or Die

Will this fly? Journalism's search for a support system

Charles M. Sennott, Charles Lewis, Carroll Bogert, Adam Davidson,  
David S. Bennahum, Michael Stoll, Peter Osnos, John Yemma,  
Amanda Michel, and John F. Harris

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The serious business of sarcasm

ALISSA QUART

### THE HIDDEN VICTIMS OF 9/11

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### PICTURE PERFECT?

What the graphic novel brings to nonfiction

RICHARD GEHR

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# COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

March/April 2009

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—from the founding editorial, 1961

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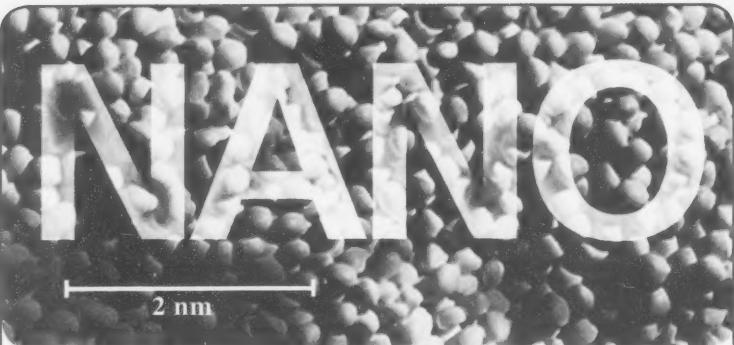
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DEAN Nicholas Lemann

CHAIRMAN Victor Navasky

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EXECUTIVE EDITOR Mike Hoyt

MANAGING EDITOR/PRINT Brent Cunningham

MANAGING EDITOR/WEB Justin Peters

ASSOCIATE EDITOR/COPY MANAGER Tom O'Neill

EDITOR AT LARGE James Marcus

STAFF WRITERS Liz Cox Barrett, Curtis Brainard (Science), Megan Garber, Clint Hendler

ASSISTANT EDITORS Katia Bachko, Jane Kim

THE AUDIT Dean Starkman (Kingsford Capital Fellow), Ryan Chittum, Elinore Longobardi

WEST COAST EDITOR Tom Goldstein

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS James Boylan, Christopher Hanson, Neil Hickey, Julia M. Klein, Trudy Lieberman, Robert Love, Judith Matloff, Michael Massing, Douglas McCollam, Alissa Quart, Michael Shapiro, Scott Sherman, Eric Umansky

INTERNS Katherine Bagley (Science), Sara Germano, Peter A. Kollmann, Megan McGinley, Christopher Morris-Lent

DESIGN Point Five, NY:

Alissa Levin, Benjamin Levine, Nathan Eames

WEB SITE DEVELOPMENT Michael Murphy

PUBLISHER Evan Cornog

DEPUTY PUBLISHER Dennis Giza

DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC INITIATIVES Janine Jaquet

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CONTACT US Columbia Journalism Review  
Journalism Building, 2950 Broadway  
Columbia University, New York, NY 10027

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# Opening Shot



Embattled automakers need lithium for the batteries that will power the next generation of electric cars. Bolivia has half the world's known supply of lithium, buried beneath massive salt flats (above). But questions of how to get it without despoiling this pristine environment and how to ensure that Bolivians are justly compensated have thus far snarled a simple matter of supply and demand that has the potential to transform the economy of one of the poorest nations in South America. Similarly, America's mainstream press, for all its many failings, remains the primary producer of the kind of public-service journalism that is hard (and expensive) to do and essential to a healthy republic. Despite all the slings and arrows hurled at the press, demand for quality journalism remains strong, and may actually be getting stronger as citizens search for it in a vast and fragmented media. But the old systems of support and delivery are dissolving, and the effort to build new ones—to transform journalism—involves difficult questions and tradeoffs, like those Bolivia faces with its lithium. Starting on page 22, we explore some of the more ambitious experiments under way; we asked the people leading those experiments to peer five years down the road and tell us how the transformation looks from the other side. The future, they tell us, is crowd-sourced, collaborative, and reliant on a range of funding streams. We hope you enjoy it. **CJR**

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**Past the salt** Mounds of salt on Bolivia's Salar de Uyuni cover huge lithium deposits that could turn Bolivia into the "Saudi Arabia of lithium."



## Reasons to Believe

*Journalism's search for a support system*

There is a lot of death talk around journalism lately. A case in point that stuck in our craw was Michael Hirschorn's recent *Atlantic* piece about *The New York Times*: the Gray Lady might expire, he predicted, by May. We doubt it. But more alarming, to us and others, was the article's casual understatement of the meaning of such a loss if it occurred, as well as the wider loss of newspaper ability and ambition across the country, which is indeed occurring, and

fast. "The collapse of daily print journalism will mean many things," Hirschorn writes. "And it will seriously damage the press's ability to serve as a bulwark of democracy." Tim McGuire, of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism at Arizona State, had this reaction in his blog: "Ya think?"

McGuire continued, "Hirschorn tossed off in one dismissive sentence the most crucial potential developments for journalism and democracy since the First Amendment." He's not *that* far off. As the historian Paul Starr pointed out in the March 4 *New Republic*, to lose newspapers is to change our political system, and not for the better.

CJR's running total of journalists laid off or bought out since January 2007 was 11,250 by mid-February, and we surely missed some. Our fear is that America won't realize what it has lost until the mainstream press is a ninety-pound weakling—online, on paper, on whatever. In the words of Joseph Pulitzer, at the start of a paragraph that sits on a brass plaque

in the building where we work, "Our Republic and its press will rise or fall together..."

We see some faint reasons for hope. For one, even though the handcuffs of investor expectations and towering stacks of debt are all too real, and even though the challenges to the financial model that supports newsgathering are truly profound, those troubles have been conflated with the recession. Ad revenue didn't fall off a cliff until the recession got under way. And the recession will end.

Second, even while newspapers in particular waited way too long to wrestle seriously with the Web, the smarter ones are doing so. More important, a mighty public appetite for serious reporting and analysis remains. *The Times*, whose death Hirschorn so blithely predicts, reaches an average of nearly twenty million unique visitors on the Web every month, and each visitor spends on average of more than a half an hour each day. Research by Steven S. Ross, editor of *Broadband Properties* (and the author of our Craigslist-didn't-do-it piece on page 8), indicates that newspapers as a whole are gaining online readers far faster than they are losing print readers. Also, it seems obvious to us that, given the new administration and the savage economy, Americans are more interested in reporting than at any time since 9/11.

Finally, there is great and healthy innovation and ferment, both outside and inside the mainstream media, as journalists and engaged citizens collectively search for an economic support system for reporting. Connecting appetite and

innovation to income will not be easy, but we don't really have a choice. Smart people are on the job, and in this issue, we asked some of them to make their case, starting on page 22.

THIS IS UNUSUAL IN THIS SPACE, BUT WE'RE IN UNUSUAL times. Journalists are members of a tribe searching for a new valley to sustain it. CJR would like to be among the scouts for this journey, and we're looking for help. We are marshalling our resources, online and in print, to advance the conversation about the innovation necessary for the survival of serious reporting. Our current goal is \$15,000 toward that effort, money that we will try to leverage for additional support. If you are able to contribute, we are very grateful. Please do so via <http://cjr.org/donations>, or via a check to the *Columbia Journalism Review*, c/o CJR, Fund for Journalism's Future, 2950 Broadway, New York, NY 10027. Contributions are tax deductible. **CJR**

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**Left Hanging**

In "Hung Out to Dry" (CJR, January/February), Laura Rozen makes a good point when she writes that "the national-security press dug up the dirt, but Congress wilted." But let's not forget that for most of the Bush years, the Republicans were the majority in both houses and weren't likely to have hearings on their own party. The Dems (Waxman, Conyers) did try to hold minority-party hearings, but after 2006, they stopped pushing back. Still, it isn't fair to lay the blame on Congress and exempt the press from responsibility.

Many of us citizens formed around the blogosphere to get information and lobby journalists and news organizations to pursue national-security stories. The mainstream media were our only hope, and by and large, they failed us. Of course, I recognize the work of the courageous few—Priest, Risen, Lichtenblau, Laura Rozen, and a few others, without whom we would know less than we do, but Rozen shouldn't let her less courageous colleagues off the hook.

James

Comment posted on CJR.org

**Whose Truth?**

Excellent essay ("Un-American" by Michael Massing, CJR, January/February). After the 2004 election, when analysts were trying to figure out how the red and blue states had become so divided, it seemed apparent to me: a huge swath of the country were listening exclusively to conservative talk radio with its relentless demonization of liberals. Worse, though, conservative media have hijacked the truth—either by distorting it to gain an advantage or flat-out lying, as they did about Obama on countless occasions. How can a democracy flourish when we can't even agree on what's true?

Name withheld

Portland, OR

The left-wing media have outlets for their



## How can a democracy flourish when we can't even agree on what's true?

agenda in newspapers and cable shows across America. So where do you get a different viewpoint? Talk radio, where Rush [Limbaugh], Sean [Hannity], and others have never wavered in their quest to speak their minds. When Michael Massing shouts that listening to right-wing is un-American, he is advocating censorship. All Americans have the right to free speech.

Cho Dan

Kingston, NY

**Dart Dispute**

You missed your target with the Dart thrown at the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* for failing to stick by reporter Bob Paynter's story on racial disparities in the Cuyahoga County criminal-justice system. *Plain Dealer* editor Susan Goldberg recognized that Paynter's reporting did not meet the *Plain Dealer*'s journalistic standards and sought to maintain its

integrity by correcting the record.

In your column, you imply that when I met with the editorial board to point out the numerous inaccuracies of the series, Paynter was not present to defend his work. That is false. Paynter along with his editor and at least a dozen other *Plain Dealer* staffers sat through a two-hour presentation by my office that dissected his series point by point. Except for the occasional attempt to defend portions of his series, Paynter sat silent as my office presented fact after fact that discredited his reporting. It is difficult for an editor to defend an article when the reporter cannot do it himself.

I am also disappointed that you did not call my office for comment. We would have reviewed this article with you just as we did with the *Plain Dealer* editors and staffers. Unfortunately, the benefits that could have resulted from this series were diminished by Paynter's shoddy reporting. If there were errors made in this or any article, I am certain we could all agree that the appropriate action would be to correct the record. The *Plain Dealer* appears to have made that decision, which I believe demonstrates its commitment to journalistic ethics and integrity. For that, I believe a Laurel would have been more appropriate than a Dart.

Bill Mason

Cuyahoga County Prosecutor  
Cleveland, OH

*The editors respond:* Just as Bob Paynter and Stuart Warner stand by their work on their extraordinary series "Justice Blinded," so do we stand by our Dart. Paynter's series was assigned by *Plain Dealer* editor Susan Goldberg and approved by her before publication. We neither stated nor implied that Paynter wasn't present for the editorial-board meeting. Whatever the reasons behind Paynter's silence during much of the proceedings, in the end, his editors

failed to defend the work and provide a proper forum for Paynter to do so. CJR conducted its own review of the *Plain Dealer*'s series and Mason's criticisms, and we remain confident in the accuracy of Paynter's reporting. **CJR**

## NOTES FROM ONLINE READERS

WE RECENTLY LAUNCHED PAGE VIEWS, our Wednesday blog about books. James Marcus, who edits the Ideas & Reviews section of CJR and, now, Page Views, interviewed David Denby, the *New Yorker* film critic, about *Snark*, Denby's new book. According to Denby, snarky writing may be reaching a new level of toxicity.

Denby is accurate on several points here, including the role of anonymity in facilitating snark and the deeper cultural impulse toward it as a reaction against dishonesty in the public sphere. John Knowles wrote that "sarcasm is the protest of the weak," and the popularity of *The Daily Show*, Gawker, etc., over the past decade has been a kind of mass refuge-taking from the abuses of the powerful in the sanctuary of the court jester.

To a point, that's healthy; the problem becomes the poverty of ideas behind all the mockery. The court jester never usurps the throne because he doesn't pose a serious threat to the reigning orthodoxy, and in fact is subtly dependent on it. The solution isn't to encourage somber scolds—there's a happy medium to be found since true wits are also great moral teachers beneath the brilliant surface—but to encourage genuine ideas. —Austin

A writer for *The New Yorker* attacking Tom Wolfe? What a surprise. I've reread Wolfe's tour de force ["Radical Chic"] on Leonard Bernstein's party for the Black Panthers, and it can only be interpreted as 'snarky' by a committed and uncritical upper-crust urban liberal. Wolfe was going very much against the media grain in 1970 by turning on fellow self-consciously evolved urban upperclassmen the very weapons of ridicule they employ. It's no wonder Denby doesn't see this. —Mark Richard

## EDITOR'S NOTE



THE THUMBNAIL MAGAZINE COVER ABOVE IS SOMETHING WE'RE PROUD TO present—the first issue of *Columbia Journalism Review Chinese*, to be published and distributed in China. *CJRC* will consist primarily of articles from this magazine translated into Mandarin, along with new material created by our Chinese partner, World Executive Group, a private company that specializes in information research. This is our first foreign-language edition.

The first issue of *CJRC* includes pieces such as "Love Thy Neighbor: The religion beat in an age of intolerance," by Tim Townsend (May/June 2008); "May I Speak Freely: Anthony Lewis on the First Amendment's march to victory," a review by Aryeh Neier (January/February 2008); and "Red Ink Rising: How the press missed a sea change in the credit-card industry" by Dean Starkman (March/April 2008). The Chinese section of this issue of *CJRC* includes material on "The World's 500 most influential brands of 2008." The company will initially distribute copies to key members of the Chinese media and also sell single copies.

Not that you would confuse the two, but the thumbnail on the top right is our other new publication, a book called *Correct Me If I'm Wrong*. It is a gathering of the best of The Lower Case, CJR's ongoing archive of misfired headlines (see page 64). Gloria Cooper, who curated The Lower Case until her retirement in 2007, edited the book and, I have to tell you, it is much funnier than *CJRC*. *Correct Me* is on sale (\$9.95) through a partnership with the Newseum, via the Newseum's Web site, its gift shop, or by calling 202-292-6300.

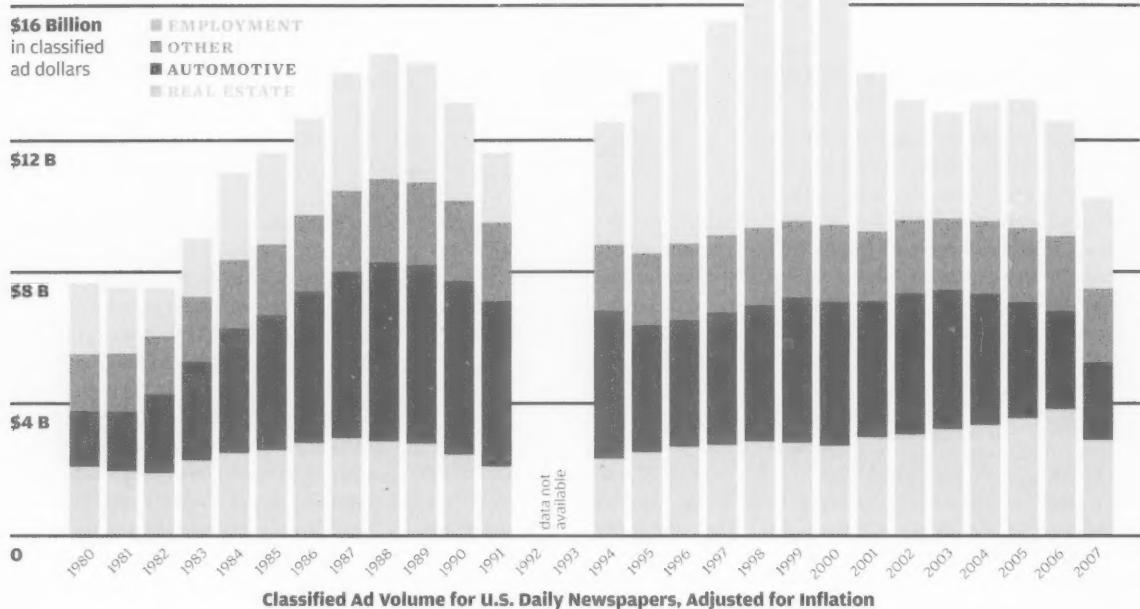
Finally, I want to introduce two new beats at CJR.

Clint Hender, picking up from his cover story in our January/February issue, will cover the transparency beat. He'll report on the nexus between the press, the public, and the issue of government transparency, including how these play out in both the stimulus and bailout efforts of the Obama administration. This is possible thanks to a generous grant from the Sunlight Foundation, for which we are grateful.

Megan Garber will cover the news innovation beat, thanks to a grant from the Carnegie Corporation. (That generous grant supported a cover package on information overload in our November/December issue as well, and also additional online-only material on the topic.) Garber will explore the upheaval under way on both the economic and editorial fronts in our business, how quality journalism must change—and is changing—as it attempts to engage readers in our distraction-rich society, and the ongoing conversation between old and new media as they both seek a viable future. This is a crucial beat, and we are seeking funds to add firepower to it. For more on this, please see our editorial on page 4.

Hender and Garber's work on these vital beats will appear regularly online, at [cjr.org](http://cjr.org), and occasionally in this magazine. —Mike Hoyt

# Currents



## Craigslist = Straw Man

Data gathered by the Newspaper Association of America show a savage decline in newspaper ad revenue in the third quarter of 2008, down 18 percent from the same period the previous year. Classified volume was down 30 percent for the same quarter. Craig Newmark, the founder of Craigslist, has been tried and convicted in the media for causing that decline. (Over drinks at the big annual journalism educators' conference in San Antonio in 2005, Newmark jokingly apologized to me for the destruction of American newspapers.) The question is by now familiar: How can newspapers compete with a venue that accepts free ads? In fact, newspapers *have* been competing. Craigslist

started in 1995 and went national in 2000, the year the dot-com bubble burst, ending a flush period for employment ads. Yet after that period, newspaper classifieds at least held their own through 2006. Total classified advertising volume in daily papers increased from \$12.5 billion in pre-Craigslist 1994 to \$14.2 billion in 2007. Total ad volume (including display and Web advertising) was \$45.4 billion in 2007, versus \$34.1 billion in 1994.

Even after adjusting for inflation, classified revenue was up slightly through 2006, compared to 1994. And in the down year of 2007, inflation-adjusted display advertising

volume was \$600 million above 1994.

But the most commonly used measure of inflation, the rise in all prices for urban wage earners, tells only part of the story. Eight percent fewer dailies share that extra revenue now, and advertisers reached 18 percent fewer print subscribers in 2007 than they reached in 1994.

Thus, the typical newspaper saw significant, real gains in revenue at least through early 2008, by which time the economy was firmly in recession. What's more, advertisers were willing to spend more per subscriber: \$855 in 2007, compared to \$548 in 1994—up 62 percent

**'They called me once—to comment when Britney and Madonna kissed.... But I was too busy reading about Afghanistan to do it.'**—Rachel Maddow, in early January, when asked whether she had ever appeared on Fox News

(adjusted for inflation, the increase is 16 percent).

So why would advertisers spend more to reach a decreasing number of subscribers? One reason is that newspapers gained pricing power, aggressively raising rates as direct competition from other newspapers decreased in major cities.

The second, and bigger, reason: advertisers look beyond the newspaper print subscriber base to readers on the Web. Newspaper publishers on average calculate their online ad revenue at less than 10 percent of their total ad revenue, but that's an underestimate. Clearly, advertisers have noticed that online readership has more than made up for losses in print subscribers and revenue.

Unfortunately, as ad revenue climbed to its peak in 2000, just before the dot-com meltdown, chains overpaid to buy competitors. (The New York Times Company bought *The Boston Globe* in 1993 for \$1.1 billion. As of early January, the value of all Times stock was less than that.) And now, owners compound their errors by mistaking severe economic stress for reader and advertiser disinterest, and by trumpeting that assessment to Wall Street.

Craigslist is a straw man. It is the ups and downs of the economy that truly affect classified advertising and, so far, they've been resilient.

There's no substitute for what quality newspapers do, on paper or online, and cheapening the product only

narrowed the advantage. Advertisers are already on board, and neither they nor readers are served by cutting quality.

—Steven S. Ross

## One Shot

IN 1999, AN IRANIAN COLLEGE student and an Iranian news photographer crossed paths briefly but momentarily in Tehran during a student protest of regime practices. The photographer, Jamshid Bayrami, on assignment for Reuters, snapped a shot of the student, Ahmad

the protest; after the photo appeared, he was sentenced to death and tortured. But the photo also helped produce a humanitarian outcry that got his death sentence rescinded. Batebi fled Iran while out of prison on medical leave, and his arrival in the U.S. in spring 2008 was well covered. But little has been said about Bayrami, now forty-seven and a well-known photographer. Jane Gottlieb and translator Nahid Siabdoust interviewed Bayrami in Farsi, via e-mail, about his most famous photo.

**What do you recall about the moment when you photographed Batebi?**

The students had gathered to protest the beating and killing of Tehran University students by police and regime thugs. Every day, the crowd of students was growing larger. Batebi was among the students—tall,

with long hair and a headband. His face really stood out; and in one rare instant in which there was silence in his expression and he was holding that bloody T-shirt, with the green background of foliage in that crowded and loud atmosphere, I took that photograph.

**Did others hold you responsible for what happened to**



Batebi, holding up the bloodied shirt of a fellow protestor who had been shot. The photograph appeared on the July 17 cover of *The Economist* and was splashed across newspapers worldwide, providing an instant symbol of pro-democracy student protests that remain the most significant in Iran's modern history. Batebi was imprisoned for his participation in

## HARD NUMBERS

**26.9** million live video streams CNN.com

Live delivered on inauguration day (more than five times the previous record of 5.3 million last year on election day)

**8,500** status updates posted on Facebook during the first minute of Obama's speech

**600,000** status updates posted through the CNN.com Live Facebook feed as of 1:15 p.m. on inauguration day (Facebook partnered with CNN.com to enable viewers to comment)

**38** million Americans who watched inauguration coverage on TV, the most since Ronald Reagan took office in 1981 (41.8 million)

**\$60,000** amount the *Hartford Courant* will save annually on travel by cutting its last major league baseball beat (Red Sox)

**14** percent interest rate attached to the \$250 million Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim Helú loaned *The New York Times*

**€600** million (\$769 million)—amount the French government is pledging to help the country's newspaper industry (proposal includes tax breaks for delivery services, efforts to decrease printing costs, and free newspaper subscriptions for eighteen-year-olds)

**6** number of years Iraq has been the deadliest country in the world for the press

**11** journalists killed in Iraq in 2008

**187** journalists and media workers killed on duty in Iraq since the beginning of the war in March 2003

The Associated Press, Editor & Publisher, The New York Times, Committee to Protect Journalists

**Batebi? How did you react?**

Emotionally, I suffered a great deal due to this photograph, because whenever anyone found out I was the photographer, they would say I was responsible for this young man being imprisoned, and they would curse me. For a while, I disliked myself and stopped photography altogether. And from that day on, I put aside news photography forever, and took on social-documentary photography.

**You later learned how Batebi felt about the photograph.**

**What did he say?** For years, I was in emotional torment and suffering, until one day I heard that Batebi had said he's not upset with me and that I had only carried out my professional duty. That's when I was finally relieved.

**You've documented events in Iran for several decades. How has a sense of place informed your work?** I've learned photography through practicing, and have photographed many developments inside Iran—from the Iran-Iraq war to the present. I have never

applied to the U.S. or Europe for immigration, and as a photographer, I document Iran's religious societies, and Afghani refugees who have become asylum-seekers in Iran due to the war in their country. I am not a photographer who is in pursuit of fame and sensationalism. I live in my own world.

## Dutch Treat

AFTER A CRY FOR HELP FROM the print media, the Dutch government has established an €8 million (\$10.2 million) fund to jumpstart the search for digital and other innovative solutions to the dramatic collapse of revenues at newspapers and newsmagazines. In April, Ronald Plasterk, the country's minister of education, culture, and science, will hear recommendations from a committee on how the money should be spent.

As in the U.S., paid newspaper circulation in the Netherlands has steadily decreased—particularly over the last five years. In the third

quarter of 2008, 3.6 million newspapers (not counting free papers) were printed—2.4 percent fewer than in the same months in 2007, according to Het Oplage Instituut, which tracks these data. The industry's financial problems have been compounded by a rapid loss of advertising, a result of the spreading American credit crisis, and by, in at least one case, failing management.

This marks the first time the Dutch print media have asked the government to help them survive. Ironically, it was Plasterk himself who provoked the request. Presenting his policy for the print media in November, he said his hands were halfway tied because government interference would compromise journalistic independence.

Industry leaders loudly criticized this hands-off policy. Lawmakers, increasingly concerned about the impact of eroding news coverage on democracy, agreed that something had to be done. Emboldened, more than forty editors-in-chief, publishers, and directors of newspapers

and newsmagazines sent a letter to Plasterk, urging him to "level the playing field." They pointed out that public broadcast organizations annually receive €500 million in government subsidies and take in an extra €200 million from advertising. This, they wrote, constitutes "unfair competition."

Plasterk refuses to ban commercials from public television and radio, but intends to get the money for the new innovation fund from the revenue these commercials generate. He rejects the idea of direct governmental subsidy for print media because they are commercial enterprises.

For now, most newspaper executives have welcomed the innovation fund. (One exception is the largest daily, the free market-championing *De Telegraaf*, which opposes governmental support and instead wants more freedom to grow through mergers and acquisitions.) But industry representatives say that the proposed budget—less than 1 percent of the government's €900 million media budget for 2009—isn't even close to what's needed to keep newspapers and magazines afloat until Internet ventures become profitable. The Netherlands Association of Journalists (NVJ) says €24–35 million is necessary, comparable to the sum that public broadcast organizations receive for new-media projects.

The money should be used to ensure that journalism, not necessarily newspapers, survives, says NVJ Secretary General Thomas Bruning. "You don't want to protect the steam train; you want to protect public transportation."

—Hélène Schilders

## LANGUAGE CORNER SNARK HUNT

Write [LanguageCorner@cjr.org](mailto:LanguageCorner@cjr.org)

SOMETIMES, DICTIONARIES JUST DON'T GET IT. THIS ONE WILL DEFINE A WORD ONE way; that one will define the same word another way. C'mon, people! It's not like anyone's depending on you or anything!

If that sounded "snarky," you'd better check your definition, because that's one of the words dictionaries don't agree on.

As it's used most of the time nowadays, "snarky" means *sarcastic* or *irreverent*. But you couldn't prove that by the journalist's bible, *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, which defines "snarky" as "touchy, short-tempered, irritable, etc." That's *Merriam-Webster's* first definition, too, though it has a second definition: "sarcastic, impudent, or irreverent manner <snarky lyrics>." The *New Oxford American Dictionary* swings the other way, listing "sharply critical; cutting; snide" as the first definition and "cranky; irritable" as the second. In fact, "snarky" was born "irritable" in British English, and gained its "sarcasm" here in the States.

"Snark" and "snarky" probably derived from "snort," which has been used for hundreds of years to indicate something spoken with contempt or derision. ("I never read dictionaries," she snorted.) It's not far from derision to sarcasm.

—Merrill Perlman



to the **Chattanooga Times Free Press**, **The Tennessean**, and **The Post and Courier** for strong reporting on the coal-ash spill in Harriman, Tennessee.

On December 22, a forty-

acre elevated retention pond, which stored more than a billion gallons of fly-ash sludge, a byproduct of coal combustion, ruptured, leaking its contents over some three hundred acres, including into the Emory and Clinch rivers. In addition to the physical force of the spill, which destroyed several homes, the ash contained arsenic and other toxic compounds. The effect on the area was best captured by a strong package of aerial photographs by *The Tennessean*, which showed readers the full extent of the damage.

As cleanup began, the *Chattanooga Times Free Press* dug deeper, analyzing inspection records to show that authorities had known of the pond's structural vulnerabilities prior to the rupture. The *Press* also reported that the Environmental Protection Agency does not regulate the toxic ash because it does not classify the material as hazardous. Thirteen hundred such ponds around the U.S. store the country's fly ash; 72 million tons of ash were generated in 2007, according to the American Coal Ash Association.

An investigation by *The Post and Courier* in Charleston, South Carolina, first examined the issue in October 2008 in a prescient series entitled, "Toxic Ash: A License to Pollute." "For years, coal-burning companies, along with federal and state regulators, viewed ash as if it was no more dangerous than dirt," the paper asserted. "But contamination cases here and across the country, along with a growing body of evidence about the effects of ash on wildlife, raise new questions about how this little-known byproduct is handled—and how it will be dealt with in the future."

**DART** to **these same papers** and to **The Associated Press**, for blowing a chance to clarify the environmental complexities around coal. The media ran into trouble when they attempted to balance the voices of the Tennessee Valley Authority, the utility responsible for both the ash pond that flooded and the coal plant that generated the ash, with voices from local conservation groups.

"There is no such thing as 'clean' coal, and this is a perfect example of that," Nancy Cave, the Coastal Conservation League's project director, told *The Post and Courier*. While that is undoubtedly true—burning coal will always produce toxic byproducts—local and national reporters failed to place the term in proper context. Strictly speaking, "clean coal" (a public-relations term promoted by the coal

industry) refers to carbon-capture and storage technologies that many experts think can be employed to trap the carbon-dioxide emissions from coal plants and store them more safely underground. While journalists have been right to criticize the misleading nature of the term, they tend to oversimplify a very important issue when they don't explain the broader reality behind it.

Most experts agree that the energy industry should begin phasing out its use of coal and invest in greener technologies like wind and solar, and also that that process will take some time. Coal still generates almost 32 percent of the nation's power. More importantly, it is still our cheapest energy source, and as electricity prices inevitably rise during the transition to clean energy, some burning of coal will be necessary to defray the costs. Given that reality, The Union of Concerned Scientists recommends that the federal government invest in research and development for carbon-capture and storage projects. That technology still faces many technical hurdles, however, and has not been proven to work on any meaningful scale.

The point is that the full, complicated reality of "clean coal" needs to be aired in and by our media so people can make informed decisions rather than emotional ones, and the fly-ash spill in Tennessee provided an occasion to do just that. Reporters missed that opportunity by tossing off clean-coal sound bites from local advocates without providing sufficient context. Coal is certainly not clean, but in essence, the confusion of terms led environmentalists and journalists to inadvertently criticize a technology that is designed to reduce pollution. Indeed, one type of carbon-capture technology—something called integrated gasification combined cycle—could reduce or eliminate coal ash as a byproduct.

The best way for reporters to bring more clarity to the national dialogue about coal is to engage scientists, rather than activists, as sources. Several groups, including the Society of Environmental Journalists, have called for greater cooperation between scientists and journalists, but acknowledge that the relationship needs work. One session at SEJ's 2007 conference was entitled "Can This Marriage Be Saved? Why Journalists and Scientists Just Don't Communicate."

The energy story is an obvious place for journalists and scientists to strengthen their relationship. Scientists, not advocates, can best explain the realities of clean-coal and green technologies and provide the nuanced picture that so many advocates eschew. **CJR**

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*For further analysis of the coverage of coal fly-ash ponds ("From Fly Ash to 'Clean Coal': National media slow to expand upon excellent, local reporting after recent spills," February 20, 2009) and other discussions on science and environment news, please visit The Observatory at CJR.org.*

## The Sarcastic Times

*For Rachel Maddow and the other ironic anchors, absurdity is serious stuff*

ON A WEDNESDAY NIGHT IN DECEMBER, RACHEL MADDOW, IN A TOREADOR-style black jacket, waits for her show to start. She types last-minute notes on her computer with the intensity of a graduate student. At the 30 Rock news television studio, with its red, white, and blue décor, late-night assistants running about, and two dozen television screens on all around her, Maddow seems in her element. And when the show begins, perhaps unsurprisingly, it is devoted to "Blago"—the thoroughly and hilariously embarrassing (and now former) Illinois governor Rod Blagojevich. Maddow asks the "awkward question," as she puts it: Is Blago not well? She riffs a bit and then concludes, with a sarcastic smile, "Illinois, you are getting almost as fun to cover as Alaska!"

MSNBC's *The Rachel Maddow Show* made its debut in the fall of 2008 and by October had grabbed 1.89 million viewers, beating CNN's *Larry King Live* in the over-twenty-five and under-fifty-four demographic for that whole month. Maddow's mocking on-air demeanor reminds many people of what they liked most about college. But she's not just clever: she's a tough-minded Rhodes Scholar, former AIDS activist, and an out lesbian. Her very existence as an anchor on cable television defies a number of different common wisdoms.

That's all remarkable unto itself. But to my mind, what *really* makes the show special is how it embodies the rise of what I think of as sarcasm news. More and more news programs are likely to go absurdist in the coming months and years. As faith in and loyalty to traditional anchors wither, one can even hear ironic Maddowan intonations creeping into the delivery of CNN's not-so-funny anchor Campbell Brown on her new show.

Now, you may be thinking, Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert perfected comedy news a while back, no? But Maddow marks a watershed for a different sort of news comedy. Stewart (and Craig Kilborn before him) was a comic first and foremost—when *The Daily Show* started, the news was the surprising part. Maddow's show works the opposite way: the news is the thing and the humor is the surprise. Along with her precursor, the five-year-old *Countdown With Keith Olbermann*, these are two "real" news programs permeated by parody.

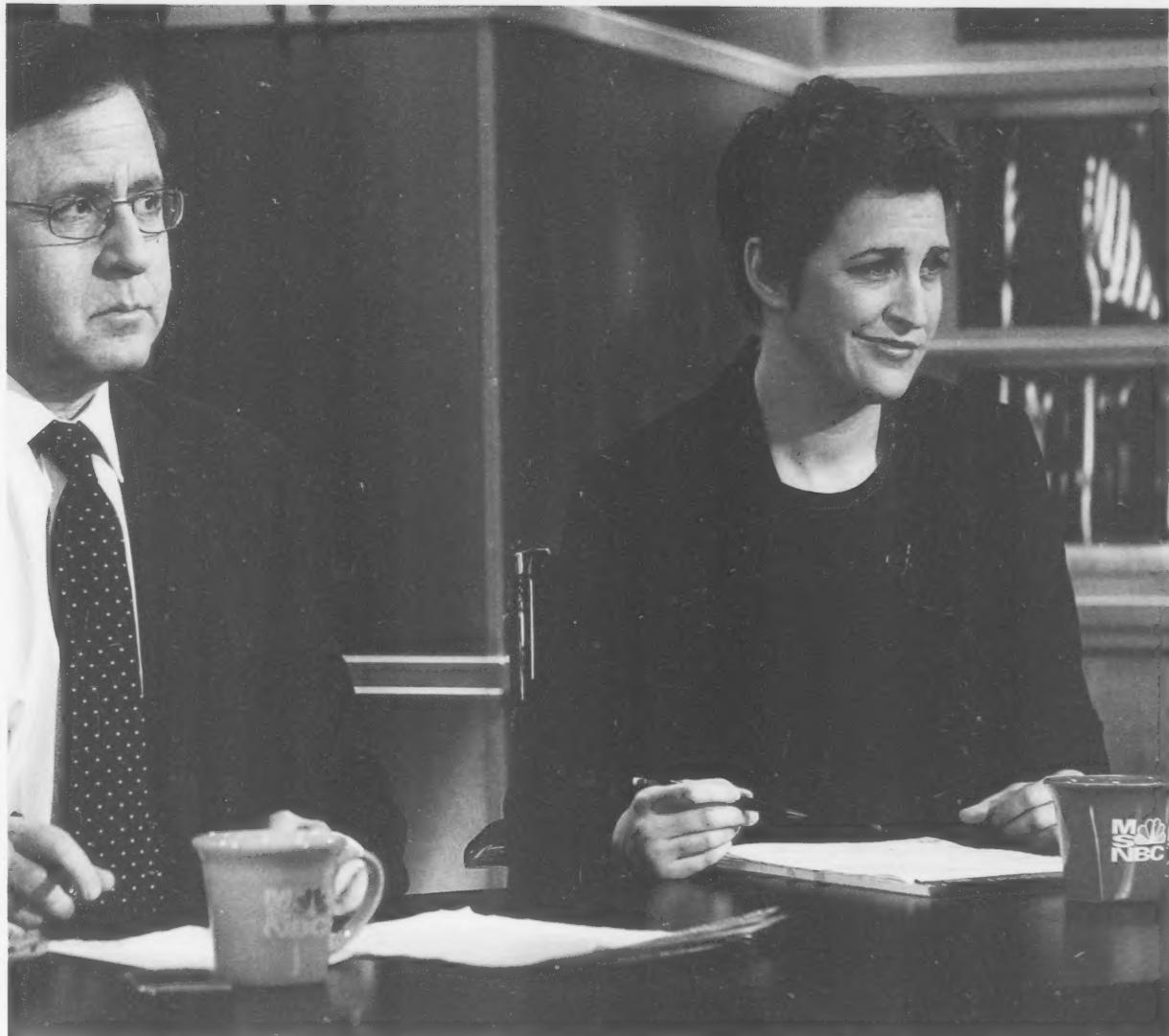
What has caused sarcastic news to flower? For starters, today's bloggers and YouTube snidesters see parody as information and information as parody. This is not entirely a mistake. Now, the news-with-satire approach can seem like the only thing that makes sense, since at least these shows are in on their own jokes. Even politicians sometimes embrace the idea of themselves as caricatures. They show up on *Saturday Night Live* to rap, or to meet their comedy doubles.

They import self-parody into their own campaigns, as in Hillary Clinton's faux *Sopranos* video on YouTube.

Also, the proliferation of niche audiences spurs sophisticated and partisan humor because these smaller groups of viewers have very particular tastes, identities, and affinities. They are thus more likely to share a sense of what's funny. Critical verbal humor is a very specific thing—one reason that American film comedies struggle for viewers overseas. Sarcastic ripostes call for sarcastic viewers who know how, and when, to laugh. Simply put, Maddow is joking to the converted.

Finally, we have a far more sophisticated audience today than in the past, one that sees more clearly behind the manipulations and stagecraft of its political leaders.

Two decades ago, Reagan got away with his spin, and his spinster, Michael Deaver, was and still is considered an untainted spokesman. Karl Rove, on the other hand, is widely seen as a vile little prince of handling. Yet Deaver, if we remember, was as much a master manipulator as Rove was; he got Reagan, you'll recall, to gin up fake remorse during the Iran-Contra affair. Both the comedy and the news coverage of our decade and decades past reflect each era's understanding of public relations and doublespeak. Now, news parody is truly a tool with which to strike back at political PR.



**Wisdom of wit** Rachel Maddow uses satire to get political information—and critique—to her audience.

POLITICAL CARICATURES HAVE BEEN an American staple since the Colonial period. In the late nineteenth century, these sorts of illustrations tended to be scathing social critiques. In the twentieth century, though, news parodies were a bit more milquetoast. This was true even thirty-three years ago, when *Saturday Night Live's* "Weekend Update" kicked off the modern form of news parody. Back then, of course, *real* anchors exuded TV's version of gravitas and solidity. The SNL Update was just milking anchors' self-seriousness for laughs.

In the 1990s and 2000s, this satirical

mode built up a head of laughing gas with *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart*, Stephen Colbert, and Air America's Al Franken. Comic news has become so popular that it even saved the career of a louche pothead named Bill Maher, who in a few short years went from comic outlier to éminence gris.

According to Bill Wolff, executive producer of *The Rachel Maddow Show* and vice president of MSNBC's prime-time programming, nothing less than George W. Bush has paved the way for his programs, as well as the others. "The funnier side of the political spectrum is

the one where your enemies are most ridiculous," says Wolff.

Maybe, but I think it has more to do with a shift in how people like information conveyed. Bush perhaps accelerated the process. So many felt degraded by the Bush era that they wished to degrade him back, on television. And then there are liberals who are now recalling their long-forgotten weapon: wit. As Jackson Lears, a professor of American history at Rutgers University, says of Maddow and the rest, "After decades of being mocked for excessive earnestness, the Left is remembering what the

[1960s] counterculture knew: flagrant lies demand absurdist responses; they deserve to be not merely refuted but laughed to scorn."

Still, MSNBC's Wolff admits his network has gone in this direction partly due to the success of its rival network, Fox. A decade ago, Fox was established and MSNBC was just starting to brand itself as a distinct network. After Olbermann's

words we can come up with for lying, is just far less efficient than calling a lie a lie, and a liar a liar." I realized that in order to find this fully funny, you had to like jokes about abusing the thesaurus.

In October, Maddow's wit became the accidental subject of one of her shows: a tormented-looking David Frum complained on-air that her humor was juvenile. "Making jokes about it is part of the

didn't have to be afraid to be smart, and the audience can be there with me."

Maddow, like so many others in the Obama age, is moving the mainstream in her semi-subversive direction. But before progressives pop open Prosecco, celebrating how they've finally taken over not only the White House and the Senate but also cable news with comedy, let's pause to consider these shows' future. Olbermann and Maddow's audiences combined aren't as big as Brian Williams's, and their market share fell off along with everybody else's after the election. Will the clever-comedy-news trend last? I think yes, mostly because I don't believe that Obama is so radiant that he will defy parody, or that Bush and Palin alone created our taste for irony-laced news. Also, the Republicans, and their nutsy pundits, are not going away.

There are those who fret about whether news humor simply co-opts political life, acting as an escape valve that lets our civic energy dissipate. I agree with them that news satire like *Saturday Night Live's* can serve as this kind of vent, ameliorating outrage with a laugh. But Maddow's wit—and more obviously, Olbermann's—is too pointed to just act as a kind of political-anger-management regimen.

As for those critics who fear that Maddow and Olbermann and the others have replaced thoughtful newsgathering with snickering, I can see their point. But I think they don't need to worry so much. As I watched Maddow do her show in the studio that winter day, she struck me as a relatively trustworthy source for news.

She may look Chaplinesque, with her dark cap of hair and expressive black eyebrows set against pale skin, but her humor is, actually, pretty serious stuff. In fact, her take on the news is so gravely absurd it often makes the news seem even darker than it is. By calling attention to the malevolence and dishonesty around us, Maddow and the new ironic anchors have come up with one way to shake us out of our exhausted acceptance of it all. **CJR**

## Maddow's humor is, actually, pretty serious stuff. Her take on the news is so gravely absurd it often makes the news seem even darker than it actually is.

show became a hit, one might hypothesize that MSNBC thought it could go for broke by doubling down on Maddow.

Wolff ties the rise of Maddow and Olbermann to their ability to bring analysis to news audiences. "With information becoming cheap, the success of Rachel and Keith is because people want someone collating or commenting on information," says Wolff.

A LOT OF MADDOW'S SUCCESS DERIVES from her taste for the absurd. At one point during the night of my visit, I watched from the sidelines as she showed a Christmas ad made by the coal industry, starring pieces of coal with bulging eyes and green and red carol books. "Anthropomorphic lumps of carbon singing," Maddow hooted. Three cameras swung around her, using the in-your-face-and-out-of-our-minds technique so beloved by Olbermann. She then went further into the comedy ether: "The earth's rotation is slowing down...that's fodder for your next existential crisis."

Throughout her show, Maddow's bookishness comes through her wit. Early in the fall, she had a field day with Sarah Palin's penchant for falsehoods, but in a very particular way. On one show around the election, she called Palin "a prevaricating, mendacious truth-stretcher or whatever other thesaurus

way that I am talking about it," Maddow fired back. "I don't necessarily agree with you on 'grown up.' I think there's room for all sorts of different kinds of discourse, including satire, including teasing, including humor. There's a lot of different ways to talk about stuff, and Americans absorb information in a lot of different ways."

It was a standoff between a conservative who knew that his party had lost its sense of humor and an anchor utterly assured that satire was the transom for getting political information—and critique—to her audience.

I talked with Maddow after her show about her absurdist approach. "When Frum said I talked about things in an immature way, I am cool with that," she said, as she gleefully removed her pancake makeup (which she appeared to despise). She then told me how she first found her ironic humor, in college, when she crashed an event called Conservative Coming Out Day, stole the group's sign, and changed it to Sexually Frustrated Conservative Mud Wrestling Day. After graduation, she had more prosaic practice in comedy: her early jobs in commercial radio included writing a hot-tub-company jingle and dressing as an inflatable calculator.

Still standing in the show's mirrored makeup room, she donned her signature horn rim glasses and said, "I realized I

ALISSA QUART is a contributing editor to the Columbia Journalism Review. She is the author of two books and is working on her third, for Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

## Good Morning, Postville!

*An unlikely thorn in Agriprocessors' side*

AS A NEW WORK WEEK BEGAN IN POSTVILLE, IOWA, LAST NOVEMBER, JEFF ABBAS, with his bushy gray beard and ample paunch, manned the mike at the town's lone radio station, KPVL. After a song by Billy Bragg, Abbas delivered the latest update on Agriprocessors, the largest kosher slaughterhouse in the world and the largest employer in this town of two thousand tucked among the rolling hills just west of the Mississippi River. In May 2008, Agriprocessors had been the target of what at the time was the largest immigration raid in U.S. history, in which nearly four hundred workers were arrested. On this Monday six months later, Postville was abuzz with the news that the company had declared bankruptcy.

*"Five before nine, currently fifty-five degrees on our way to an absolutely stellar day here in God's country. I'm Jeff Abbas. We are exploring the Agriprocessors situation today all the way back as far as May, just seeking your comments and questions."*

Locals interested in learning about the fallout from the Agriprocessors raid initially had to rely on the legions of national media that parachuted into town. In Postville, there was little coverage. Sharon Drahm, the editor and only reporter at Postville's weekly newspaper, the *Postville Herald-Leader*, told me that the demands of covering the town council, the schools, and the churches left her little time to report substantively on Agriprocessors, before or after the raid. The paper also has a limited base of advertisers in a town this small, which makes offending the business community risky.

The closest serious newsgathering operations are some two hours away by car, in Waterloo and Dubuque; a professor at the University of Northern Iowa described this rural corner of Iowa as a "media desert." Indeed, when I went to Postville in 2006 to report on the working conditions at the slaughterhouse for *The Forward*, a Jewish weekly based in New York City, there was practically no local coverage of the problems at the plant, even though the owners—the Rubashkin family, Orthodox Jews from Brooklyn—had clashed with locals since the slaughterhouse opened in the late 1980s. The company had been investigated by the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and criticized by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

Abbas was not a likely candidate to fill the void. As KPVL's only employee, he was already in charge of nearly all of the station's programming, and he doesn't even draw a regular paycheck (more on that later). Abbas's background is in music programming, not journalism. But in the months after the raid, Abbas tutored himself in the art of sources and government documents and created

his own mix of news, commentary, and civic engagement, eventually becoming the local authority on the raid and its aftermath. Abbas's expanded role—and more particularly his critical bent toward Agriprocessors—which has included turns as a talking head on CNN, NPR, and Al-Jazeera English, drew criticism from members of KPVL's board and requests for Abbas to tone it down. But it has also won Abbas a significant fan base in Postville. "A lot of this stuff was only discussed in hushed tones at the diner before," said Lynda Waddington, a reporter for the *Iowa Independent* who has covered the Agriprocessors story, but who works from her home in Marion, Iowa, a two-hour drive away. "Jeff forced them into an uncomfortable position where they had to talk about it or at least listen to it."

This is not the sort of programming that anyone expected when Postville's Lutheran church secured a radio license in 2002. "We wanted something like that station in that TV show *Northern Exposure*—with the storefront window, where they could see the world go by right in front of them—you know, to be more in touch with the community," said Nina Taylor, KPVL's former treasurer. The early programming was designed to provide multilingual updates on snow days and tornado warnings. With a signal that extends about ten miles outside of town, KPVL was primarily a repeater for Iowa Public Radio.

When Abbas joined KPVL in 2006 as the station manager, his main goal was to entertain the diverse groups brought to the town by the slaughterhouse. The Guatemalan baker hosted "Noche Latina" for the workers, for example, and Sunday afternoons were given over to Jewish music for the kosher factory supervisors. Abbas did news briefs on the half hour and hour, but he admits they were "mostly canned—just stuff I pulled off the wire, along with the weather."

The turning point for Abbas came the week after the raid, when he read the descriptions of child labor, abusive supervisors, and dishonest management in the government's affidavit on the slaughterhouse. Abbas was outraged. When I interviewed him months later, he became animated as he recalled his awakening. "Every time I spent more than a few min-

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utes with that affidavit, I became more incensed," he said. "I couldn't help but become outspoken." Much of Abbas's criticism has been directed at the Rubashkins. Aaron and Sholom Rubashkin have both been charged with child-labor violations by the Iowa attorney general, and federal prosecutors have charged Sholom Rubashkin with bank fraud and immigration violations.

Abbas's position as both an insider and an outsider in Postville helped to shape his new role as town crier. He grew up in Bremer County, Iowa, seventy miles from Postville, so he knows the local ways. But he spent most of his adult life in the hippie stronghold between Stockton and Lodi in California. Abbas has none of the reticence that distinguishes most Postvilleans, and he befriended many of the curious folks who came to Postville after the raid to fill the positions at Agriprocessors. One group of workers came from homeless shelters in Texas, for example, another from the Pacific island of Palau. It was Abbas's decision to air an interview in late May, with a woman from Texas who was angry about the way the Rubashkins had treated her, that caused the first blowback from Chaim Abrahams, then the president of KPVL's board and also an executive at Agriprocessors. Abrahams wrote an e-mail to fellow board members complaining that the KPVL programs were dividing the town.

As it turns out, Abrahams had more to fear from Abbas than just the divisive effect he might have on Postville. When Abbas found a hot story, he would get on the phone to journalists elsewhere in the country with the tip. In November, after Sholom Rubashkin was jailed for bank fraud and then released on bail, Abbas turned up video footage of a celebration at Postville's synagogue, welcoming Rubashkin home at the same time that the company's workers were scrambling to keep from being evicted from their apartments. Abbas passed the video to Shmarya Rosenberg, a blogger in St. Paul, Minnesota, who has provided some of the best coverage of the raid and its aftermath; a few days later, the video was referenced in *The New York Times*.

It didn't help that as the station's influence increased, its revenue did not. Abbas was hired with the understanding

that his salary would be a commission on any underwriting he could secure—work he set aside as he hustled to expand programming. Abbas said that over the last two years he has received \$4,500 for his work at the station. He has stayed afloat, he said, by selling his old coin and stamp collections.

Tensions came to a head just before Thanksgiving, at an open meeting of the radio station's board, when Abrahams took issue with Abbas yet again. Dozens of Postville residents showed up to support Abbas. After making a plea for editorial independence, Abbas requested some sort of personal financial assistance. "I need to get myself out of the hole," Abbas told the crowd, his hands folded before him.

Nina Taylor, the station's treasurer, has been one of Abbas's supporters, but she politely expressed discomfort with the position that Abbas's work had put her and the other board members in. "There's no guideline or directions on how to deal with this," Taylor told me in an interview, "so everyone is kind of creating it as we go along." Soon after the meeting, Taylor resigned her position, citing the stress of the work.

The board did come up with a bit of money to tide Abbas over, and town officials took over much of the rescue work for the struggling former slaughterhouse workers that Abbas had been doing. (When Agriprocessors filed for bankruptcy, Abbas spearheaded an effort to provide them with basic relief, turning the KPVL studios into a food bank and working the phones in an effort to keep the electricity and water on in the workers' apartments.) On Christmas, Abbas took his first day off since Christmas the year before.

But the tension remains. Abbas has kept up his on-air commentary, and the board continues to deny him a regular paycheck. In February, Abbas applied for food stamps. He also contacted a lawyer to help him fight for a portion of a grant that KPVL got from The Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

"I'm almost fifty-five years old," Abbas said. "There's nothing else I can do. There's nothing else I want to do." CJR

NATHANIEL POPPER is a senior writer at The Forward.

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# The Companies They Keep

Fortune's dubious list of the best employers

*Fortune* does the unemployed reader a disservice with this bold headline, "Now hiring! How to Land a Top Job." Or maybe not; we're in a bad recession. Throughout the issue, in fact, *Fortune* provides tips for the job seeker on how to land a position with these companies, though several were facing layoffs. One hundred Google recruiters were laid off the week before this year's list came out, and by the time the Best Companies issue hit newsstands, engineers were losing their jobs, too. Starbucks was expecting to lay off about 6,700 employees. More companies on the list, like Microsoft, will lay off thousands of workers in the coming months, while employees at other companies endure uncertainty. Genentech, for one, may be facing a hostile takeover.

*Fortune's* descriptions of life at Google and other high-tech firms on this list are misleading. Google outsources about a third of its labor to freelance contractors who have no access to these groovy benefits. In fact, inequality within tech companies like Google is increasing, says Marcus Courtney, head of the telecom department for UNI Global Union, an international labor federation. Fewer and fewer employees enjoy the idyllic conditions portrayed here. Contractors, Courtney says, "don't even have health insurance, much less afternoon tea!" Overseas, it's worse. At a China keyboard factory serving Microsoft and others, some two thousand young women work twelve hours a day, seven days a week, and are not allowed to talk or even raise their heads on the assembly line.

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**ANNUAL PAY** \$51,350 (salaried); \$28,092 (hourly)  
Management consultant has increased recruitment of minorities (29% of staff, up from 15% in 2004). Offers first-class health insurance, \$5 co-pay for doctor visits, 100% fertility treatment coverage.

**4 Google** (4)  
Mountain View, Calif. google.com  
**EMPLOYEES** 12,580 (U.S.); 70,103 (outside U.S.)  
**JOB GROWTH** 2% NEW JOBS 2,550 (one year)  
**ANNUAL PAY** \$51,350 (salaried); \$28,092 (hourly)  
Tech powerhouse marked tenth birthday in 2008. While the company still attracts 77,000 applicants a year, hiring has slowed, and Google recently cut furloughs like afternoon tea and an annual tea trip.

**5 Wegmans Food Markets** (5)  
Rochester, N.Y. wegmans.com  
**EMPLOYEES** 27,105 (U.S.); 0 (outside U.S.)  
**JOB GROWTH** 6% NEW JOBS 691 (one year)  
**ANNUAL PAY** \$51,350 (salaried); \$28,092 (hourly)  
Recent offerings at this family-owned supermarket chain: Employees could buy gift cards of up to \$250 at a 10% discount to help with food costs. Wegmans is also calling off free yoga classes at each of its stores.

**6 Cisco Systems** (6)  
San Jose cisco.com  
**EMPLOYEES** 37,223 (U.S.); 28,600 (outside U.S.)  
**JOB GROWTH** 7% NEW JOBS 4,121 (one year)  
**ANNUAL PAY** \$131,703 (salaried); \$59,852 (hourly)  
CEO John Chambers is focusing on collaborative efforts to give employees more say in decision-making. While the company has been slow to grow, Cisco is poised to ride out the business slowdown and has about 500 job openings, mostly across engineering disciplines and in "customer advocacy."

**7 Genentech** (7)  
South San Francisco gene.com  
**EMPLOYEES** 10,969 (U.S.); 9 (outside U.S.)  
**JOB GROWTH** 5% NEW JOBS 529 (one year)  
**ANNUAL PAY** \$112,022 (salaried); \$68,228 (hourly)  
The biotech leader continued to resist a takeover by shareholder Roche. It also implemented retention bonuses and severance payments ranging from 15 to 52 weeks' pay for employees terminated after a merger.

**8 Methodist Hospital System** (8)  
Houston methodist.org  
**EMPLOYEES** 10,535 (U.S.); 0 (outside U.S.)  
**JOB GROWTH** 1% NEW JOBS 67 (one year)  
**ANNUAL PAY** \$58,791 (salaried); \$80,340 (hourly)  
Methodist broke ground on \$2 billion in construction in 2008, filled 300 new positions, and awarded merit pay raises of 3%. Salaried employees who worked long hours after Hurricane Ike got \$250 Kroger gift cards.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANTONY HARRIS

After five years, a clerk at Costco makes much more than this (\$46,600), yet Costco is not on this list. It's curious that Wegmans has remained on it for more than a decade. Unionized grocery workers pay much less for their health insurance than Wegmans's employees, and, unlike at Wegmans, their hours are guaranteed. We love yoga, too, but it's no substitute for lower-cost health care and job security. The Best Companies list doesn't care much about boring issues like compensation. In a letter to a former Starbucks employee who took issue with the list's exaggerations, Best Companies Team Manager Katie Popp wrote, "While we do consider (somewhat) salaries, benefits, and perks as part of the list selection process, the focus of our evaluation of companies lies not in tangibles but in trust in the workplace."

**COMPANIES TO WORK FOR**  
EXPERT ADVICE — THE RANKINGS

**13 Devon Energy** (40)  
Oklahoma City, Okla.

EMPLOYEES 3,752 (U.S.); 1,512 (int'l.)  
JOB GROWTH 11%; NEW JOBS 371  
ANNUAL PAY \$16,882 (salaried)  
Money guitars to employees a  
new call for annual company con-

**14 Robert W. Baird** (41)  
Milwaukee, robertwaird.com

EMPLOYEES 2,184 (U.S.); 97 (int'l.)  
JOB GROWTH 6.4%; NEW JOBS 131  
ANNUAL PAY \$12,700 (salaried)  
This Midwest-based employee  
adviser thrived despite the m-

**15 W.L. Gore & Associates** (42)  
Newark, Del., gore.com

EMPLOYEES 5,481 (U.S.); 2,633 (int'l.)

JOB GROWTH 5%; NEW JOBS 276

ANNUAL PAY N/A

The maker of Gore-Tex celebra-

2008 by assembling an archiv-

2008 stories and images sub-

"employees," or highly engage-

**16 Qualcomm** (43)  
San Diego, qualcomm.com

EMPLOYEES 41,932 (U.S.); 2,395 (outside U.S.)

JOB GROWTH 19%; NEW JOBS 1,907 (one year)

ANNUAL PAY \$122,030 (salaried); \$23,108 (hourly)

Wireless-communications designer keeps new ideas

flowing via an award-winning recruitment program.

It hires 750 interns a year from 38 countries.

**17 NetApp** (44)  
Folsom, Calif., netapp.com

EMPLOYEES 11,932 (U.S.); 2,395 (outside U.S.)

JOB GROWTH 19%; NEW JOBS 1,907 (one year)

ANNUAL PAY \$122,030 (salaried); \$23,108 (hourly)

Wireless-communications designer keeps new ideas

flowing via an award-winning recruitment program.

It hires 750 interns a year from 38 countries.

**18 Edward Jones** (45)  
St. Louis, edwardjones.com

EMPLOYEES 11,932 (U.S.); 2,395 (outside U.S.)

JOB GROWTH 19%; NEW JOBS 1,907 (one year)

ANNUAL PAY \$122,030 (salaried); \$23,108 (hourly)

Wireless-communications designer keeps new ideas

flowing via an award-winning recruitment program.

It hires 750 interns a year from 38 countries.

**19 Methodist Hospital System** (46)  
Columbus, Ohio, methodisthospital.com

EMPLOYEES 11,932 (U.S.); 2,395 (outside U.S.)

JOB GROWTH 19%; NEW JOBS 1,907 (one year)

ANNUAL PAY \$122,030 (salaried); \$23,108 (hourly)

Wireless-communications designer keeps new ideas

flowing via an award-winning recruitment program.

It hires 750 interns a year from 38 countries.

**20 Genentech** (47)  
South San Francisco, genentech.com

EMPLOYEES 11,932 (U.S.); 2,395 (outside U.S.)

JOB GROWTH 19%; NEW JOBS 1,907 (one year)

ANNUAL PAY \$122,030 (salaried); \$23,108 (hourly)

Wireless-communications designer keeps new ideas

flowing via an award-winning recruitment program.

It hires 750 interns a year from 38 countries.

**21 Aronoff & Porter** (48)  
Washington, D.C., aronoffporter.com

EMPLOYEES 11,932 (U.S.); 79 (outside U.S.)

JOB GROWTH 19%; NEW JOBS 1,907 (one year)

ANNUAL PAY \$122,030 (salaried); \$37,779 (hourly)

Wireless-communications designer keeps new ideas

flowing via an award-winning recruitment program.

It hires 750 interns a year from 38 countries.

**22 Whole Foods Market** (49)  
Austin, wholefoodsmarket.com

EMPLOYEES 11,932 (U.S.); 1,934 (outside U.S.)

JOB GROWTH 22%; NEW JOBS 8,570 (one year)

ANNUAL PAY \$72,239 (salaried); \$24,322 (hourly)

Slowly growing, cutbacks in new-store openings,

and 100 layoffs haven't curbed the enthusiasm of this

young workforce (28% are under age 25).

# FORTUNE

# THE 100 BEST COMPANIES TO WORK FOR

## CHECK OUT NO. 23 ZAPPOS

WHO KNEW THAT WORKING AT AN ONLINE SHOE STORE COULD BE SO COOL? *Photo: Zappos*



The list is compiled not by *Fortune's* journalists and researchers, as readers likely assume, but by a San Francisco firm called the Great Place to Work® Institute, which also offers paid consulting services to corporations on how to become a Great Place to Work®. It's not much of a competition to get on the list, either: out of 353 companies that applied to be one of the Best Companies this year, one hundred made the list. At best a hybrid of journalism and PR, the list uncritically presents companies' own mythologies about themselves as fact. The Starbucks's entry, for instance, says the company is great for "part-timers," yet Starbucks part-timers across the land are grumbling about a new policy with an Orwellian name, "Optimal Scheduling," in which many employees must make themselves available for the entire work week, without being guaranteed a single hour of work in return. This, employees say, will make working at Starbucks untenable for students, parents, or anyone who has a second job.

*Fortune* consistently allows the companies to define the word "employee" as they prefer—excluding the people at the lowest end of the supply chain. For more than a decade, Whole Foods has been criticized by the United Farm Workers and many other groups for refusing to require decent conditions for workers tending the cattle and picking the vegetables that supply its stores.

Far be it from us to quibble about a massage, but these are subsidized, not free. It's not the first time *Fortune* has exaggerated Google's perks: last year, the magazine claimed that the company had "onsite" child care, when in fact it's a few miles away. A small point, but errors on this list seem, often, to favor the companies. The entry on Starbucks, for instance, lists the salary of the most common hourly job as \$42,387. Since the most common hourly position at the company is barista—the person who makes your coffee—and these folks make between \$7 and \$11 an hour, where did this figure come from? The answer lies in a mistake that the listmakers acknowledged in correspondence but never corrected in the magazine: the Best Companies salary data covers only "full-time" employees, although *Fortune* says the survey includes part-timers.

LIZA FEATHERSTONE, a regular contributor to *Slate's* Big Money Web site, is the author of *Selling Women Short: The Landmark Battle for Workers' Rights at Wal-Mart*.

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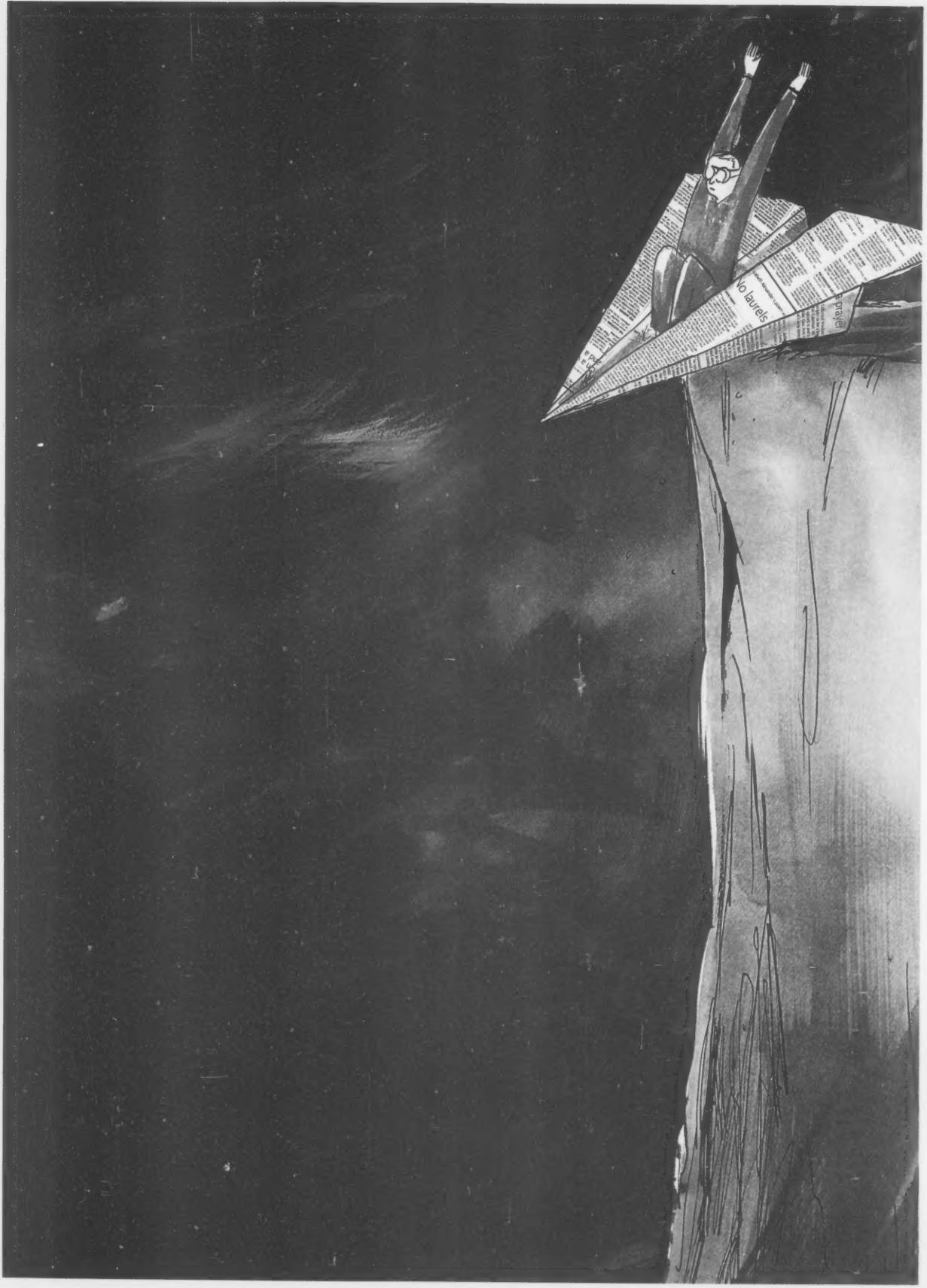
THE AMERICAN NEWSROOM SEAN HEMMERLE



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**ProPublica**  
New York, NY  
October 22, 2008





# Roll the Dice

*How one journalist gambled on the future of news*

BY CHARLES M. SENNOTT

Nine months. We'd been at this project for nine months, beginning with a few sketches on a whiteboard about how we might design a Web site for international news in the digital age. Back then it was just Phil Balboni and me in our Boston offices, surrounded by empty cubicles. First came the "wireframes," the Web-development equivalent to a sonogram, a fuzzy glimpse of life but pretty hard to decipher. Then the final design and branding,

which was a burst of fun and creativity before the grueling, detailed labor of final Web development.

All through these shifting seasons I worked the phone across time zones and traveled around the world, recruiting sixty-five foreign correspondents to write for us. Then we assembled a team of editors for the newsroom—a small, start-up-sized newsroom—and by November it was suddenly fully staffed with about fifteen people.

And now the moment had arrived for GlobalPost.com to be delivered onto the Web. It was Saturday, January 10, another late night in the grinding, over-caffeinated days before our January 12 launch. I was staring out the window at a snow-storm, large flakes swirling in the darkness and descending into the black waters of Boston Harbor. I had not slept more than a few hours a day for a week. The air was pregnant with expectation and possibility and most of all vigilance.

I was on the phone with our Web developer, Jason Oliver,

as he clicked away on his keyboard in his office in Wisconsin. He was redirecting our beta URL over to receive our domain name, GlobalPost.com, an act that would begin a process of "propagating" the site onto the servers and making it possible for the public to come and see what we had created. With a final clatter of programming code at precisely 11:11 p.m., Oliver pronounced in the steady, dry voice of a technical engineer, "It's done. I hit the button. We're live. Congratulations." With a keystroke, our Web site was lighting up on our hosting site and flowing across all of the continents. And what struck me most was the hushed silence of it all.

The digital files that contained the stories our correspondents had reported and so beautifully written, and we had so carefully edited, were reduced to zeros and ones and racing through a labyrinth of computer networks. The process of this "propagation" was an algorithm of technology nearly as mysterious to me as birth.

Nine months earlier, on a rainy April afternoon, I had left *The Boston Globe*, where I had worked for fourteen years. It was my hometown paper and the place where I had wanted to work from about the age of thirteen, when I first started reading the paper. It was the era of the legendary editor Tom Winship, who built a team of great reporters and strong voices that included George Frazier, Peter Gammons, Curtis Wilkie, Ellen Goodman, David Nyhan, Walter V. Robinson, and Mike Barnicle. It was the end of a great ride in newspapers that had lasted twenty-two years.

My path had been fairly traditional. I started out at *The Record* in Hackensack, New Jersey, covering planning-board meetings and two-bit mobsters. I had my shot at the Big Apple in 1988, writing for the *New York Post* for all of ten months and then jumping over to the *Daily News*, starting with cops and courts. Two years later, I covered the Persian Gulf War, my first big foreign assignment, though the paper went on strike just as the war got under way, and I filed for the strike paper. Afterward, I went back to street reporting, and was in lower Manhattan in 1993 when a huge explosion rocked the World Trade Center, the first glimpse of a plot that would be brought to fruition eight years later. In 1993, this was a local news story, not "foreign reporting." It was a *Daily News* story. It was about New York but had a Middle East angle. City Editor Bill Boyle dispatched me to follow the trails of suspects in Egypt, the Sudan, the West Bank, and Pakistan.

I didn't know it, but that was also the start of a fifteen-year body of work on Middle Eastern religious extremism and terrorism. I had experimented with the adrenaline addiction that is foreign reporting during the gulf war, but after chasing suspects all over the Middle East, I was completely hooked. The five-part series I had hoped for was cut considerably, however; New York shrugged off the bombing as the work of a bunch of loser taxi drivers. It was hard to see at the time that this was nascent Al Qaeda.

Soon after that series, I was hired by *The Boston Globe*. Finally, I was at a paper with a foreign desk and foreign postings, and the editor, Matt Storin, knew I had my eye on one of them. In 1997, he gave me the greatest reporting assignment I ever had: Middle East bureau chief. I spent most of the next decade in Jerusalem and London, and covered the Palestinian intifada, the war in Kosovo, conflicts in Algeria and Lebanon. I traveled throughout the Middle East. When September 11 hit, I was among the first reporters on the ground in Afghanistan. All that police reporting that began with the first World Trade Center bombing gave me the grounding to do worthwhile work. I also went to Iraq and, eventually, "The Long War" became what I covered for a living. I had three sons (soon would have four), yet the work seemed worth the considerable risk. I felt like I had something to add, like I was doing work that mattered. But then the paper put me up for a Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University and used it as leverage to extricate me from the London bureau.

By the time I got back to the *Globe* in the late summer of 2006, the landscape for American newspapers had dramatically shifted. Colleagues had complained about management and where the paper was headed, but I had dismissed most of their bleak assessments as whining, something reporters are known to do. But then the *Globe* announced the closure of all of its foreign bureaus. The mission shrank. The ambition to cover the nation and the world was put aside. It was an understandable decision when you looked at the books, but it broke my heart.

Spurred by a friend and colleague, Gary Knight, the co-founder of the photo agency VII, I began to think about starting my own foreign-news agency. While Gary and I were traveling in Afghanistan for a piece about the fifth anniversary of September 11, I told him I feared it would probably be my last foreign assignment for the *Globe*. He encouraged me to go out and do my own thing, pull together the many friends and colleagues we shared and create our own boutique foreign-news agency. It was a push.

And it got me going. I began quietly developing a proposal for a nonprofit model for an international news agency. Pretty soon I was closing in on several hundred thousand dollars from funders. Yet as I was working up this plan in my basement office, I could often hear my four boys rough-housing upstairs, pounding the floorboards above my head. It was a constant reminder that I was out of my mind to take such a financial risk and leave the paper. Buyouts were pending and that would help, but how would I provide for a big family with a startup nonprofit? I had serious doubts; staying at the *Globe* meant a steady paycheck. I resolved to stay put, but felt restless.

But then fate turned. I found out that Balboni, a legend in Boston broadcast journalism, had been developing a similar idea, one he had nurtured for more than thirty-five years, to create a collaborative for foreign correspondents, but not as a nonprofit. Phil had already put together a convincing prospectus for investors, one with a clear business plan and modest projections for revenue, built around a confident assessment that ad dollars were shifting from print and TV to the Web. I loved a part of his plan that allowed for the correspondents to own shares in the company, which meant they would be vested in its success.

Perhaps most importantly, it was written with a philosophy that I had come to respect: quality journalism has value and it needs to be paid for. Great, independent journalism should be self-sustaining. I realized I was in the presence of a rare entrepreneur: a journalist with a strong business sense and a track record. Balboni had founded the New England Cable News (NECN), and his success there had led to several key investors who were already on board. We met and combined our editorial visions into a single plan. A partnership was taking shape, and I was excited about the possibility of creating a new news organization.

Newsrooms, I believe, have a tendency to crush the entrepreneurial spirit, and those of us who love the business should resist that part of the culture. Yet every time I felt the entrepreneurial urge, I reminded myself that I had a family to think about. I was at a crossroads, unable to sleep. The buyout offer was pending. I had to decide.

The moment of clarity came thanks to my wife, Julie. In the middle of a sleepless night, she said, "For ten years, you have been getting shot at in war zones for a living. So why are you so afraid of taking a risk when it comes to your own career? You've got to do what you love." The next morning, I worked out the final terms of a deal with Phil, and I signed the buyout papers on St. Patrick's Day.

On my last morning at *The Boston Globe*, as I walked past its glorious fleet of green delivery trucks, I was sad, and took in all the things I love about the paper. The biggest part was the chatter with colleagues who know how to tell a great story, who know precisely how and when to give you a hard time, and who could make you laugh even on a bad day. I had it out a few times with some editors, but I knew I would miss the old-school types who loved the craft and had great respect for the tradition of the paper and its place in the city.

I savored one memorable sound from the newsroom in particular—the thud of the huge rolls of newsprint hitting the cement loading docks. It shook the newsroom just a bit on Thursdays before the big Sunday run. To me, this was the sound of a big city newspaper, the heft of it all.

I didn't know it then, but as we were building this start-up, two statistical lines were crossing. Print newspaper readership was trending downward and being surpassed by the rising number of those who got their news online, according to a Pew Research Center report that would be published in December 2008. We could all feel the trend advancing even if we didn't yet have the facts. And that's why on that last day of work, the wondrous thud of the newsprint hitting the docks seemed more ominous, like thunder. And the

news of the industry since I left has been devastating. More newspapers have had layoffs, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* went bankrupt and *The Christian Science Monitor* ceased its daily print edition; the *Globe* is staring down the barrel of more buyouts and likely layoffs.

So nine months later, staring out at the snow on that January night we launched GlobalPost, I was thinking about that last day at the *Globe*, and struck by the contrast I felt. The newspaper world was tactile. The trucks idle in the cold, pre-dawn morning like horses. The floor in the pressroom is slippery with ink. I had held a union card that guaranteed me "employment for life," an agreement the unions had reached in the flush days of the early 1990s. And the sound of a big newsroom chasing a breaking story was still great, even if more and more cubicles were empty. Here I was launching an entire news organization in the dead of night with only the quiet clatter of a keyboard. It just didn't seem the same somehow.

Yet creating a news organization in the ferment of the Internet has been thrilling and nerve wracking all the same. We have raised approximately \$8.5 million of the \$10 million of capital that we require, which gives us more than enough for a solid footing. We always knew it would be difficult to make this work and the global economic collapse has, of course, made it even harder. We have kept our revenue projections in place, but recognize that we will have to work harder to achieve them. No one ever said it would be easy.

And editorially, I see the global economic collapse as a great and important story for us. It's the kind of event that seems to cry out for a news organization like ours, one with a breadth of global coverage. We have a total of sixty-five correspondents in forty-five countries filing dispatches. Ten of these cover the kind of beat, or "latitude" as we dubbed it, that cuts across national boundaries and connects us all.

Our site sets out to have a distinctly American voice. Not a tone that is nationalistic or jingoistic, but a writing style with a good ear for American storytelling and a respect for the standards of American journalism. We also want to provide both current and historical context—for instance, by recognizing that Americans do not have enough grounding in history to understand international stories. So we built interactive timelines for many of the country pages. We began our launch with a fifty-part series from many corners of the world titled "For Which It Stands," focused around a single question that we wanted to pose on the eve of the new presidency: What does the idea of America mean to the world?

GlobalPost has assembled a stellar team that includes veterans such as H. D. S. Greenway and William Dowell, both with distinguished careers that stretch across a half century, from Vietnam to Iraq. We have decorated, mid-career correspondents such as Joshua Hammer in Berlin, Matt McAllister in London, Matt Benyon Rees in Jerusalem, Edward Gargan in Beijing, Carlyle Murphy in Saudi Arabia, and Jane Arraf in Baghdad. And we also have tremendous young talent, such as Mildred Cherfils in Paris, Theodore May in Cairo, and Patrick Winn in Thailand. All are working with us as a piece of freelance portfolio. They are paid a steady

retainer of \$1,000 per month for four dispatches, and they get ten thousand shares of the company. Overall, employees make up nearly half of the non-investor common stock in the company.

On the business side, Phil has kept us nimble and expanded our opportunities for revenue to include two new streams. First, we have developed a syndication model for newspapers, which are cutting back on or abandoning foreign coverage. We announced during the week of our launch that we had signed on the *New York Daily News*, a huge opportunity for our company and a great full-circle moment for me personally. Second, we created a membership model for premium content, called Passport.

It's been thrilling to be on the street for the revolution that is unfolding in our business. And of course we're not alone. In January 2007, Jim VandeHei and John F. Harris, the former

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**Newsrooms have a tendency to crush the entrepreneurial spirit, and we should resist that part of the culture.**

*Washington Post* political reporters, started Politico, which has capitalized on the most exciting election in a generation and done an excellent job building a news organization that has become a must-read for political junkies. Less than a year before our launch, Paul Steiger, the legendary *Wall Street Journal* editor, got his nonprofit ProPublica off the ground. More reporters and editors are and will emerge from the traditions of great newsrooms to try to find a niche for well-reported storytelling in the digital age.

There are many of you in your cubicles in the newsroom or your home offices now, I expect, plotting your own escape from mainstream media, and I encourage you to break out. It is an exciting time, a historic shift in how the world will be informed. I compare it to the Middle Ages. The entities that make up the Holy Roman Empire of journalism—the big city newspapers and networks—are seeing the reach of their far-flung armies diminish as smaller principalities emerge and construct their own walled city states.

I still nervously hope that those of us who've made the jump will not be remembered as Don Quixotes tilting at windmills. I try hard to convince myself on the drive home from work at the end of some very long days that we are more akin to knights of a new order, marching out with battered armor to slay some dragons. **CJR**

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CHARLES M. SENNOTT is the executive editor and co-founder of *GlobalPost*.



## 2014 How We Got Here

*Voices from an imagined future*

These are hard times. CJR counts a stunning 11,250 journalism jobs lost, mostly at newspapers, in the last two years. Out of necessity, these are times of great innovation, too, both inside and outside of media companies. Will somebody come up with a replicable way (or ways) to support serious reporting in a digital age? We don't know. We do know there are people willing to gamble on their ideas, and that's likely what it will take. Here are eight of them. We asked each to present his or her vision as if it were the spring of 2014, as a way to expand the conversation about how we all might get there.

# A Social-Network Solution

*How investigative reporting got back on its feet*

BY CHARLES LEWIS

WASHINGTON, D.C., 2014—It didn't seem possible.

Who would have thought, amid the newsroom devastation of the first decade of the twenty-first century, that investigative reporting would find a way to not just survive, but flourish, in an improbable, highly innovative new golden age?

Things had never looked bleaker financially than in 2008, when Gannett and McClatchy alone cut 5,500 newspaper jobs. Overall, according to an *Advertising Age* analysis of federal employment data, between 2000 and 2008, media industries lost more than 200,000 jobs. And no media sector was harder hit than newspaper and magazine publishing.

The most substantive public-service journalism in American history had been initiated and published by the nation's newspapers. So the specific impact of this newsroom carnage on investigative reporting—one of the most expensive and difficult genres of journalism—had been dire. Numerous Pulitzer-caliber investigative reporters throughout the nation lost their jobs, and entire "I-teams" at newspapers and television stations were shut down.

This loss of investigative power could not have come at a worse time, with the country facing the most serious financial crisis since the Great Depression, and with a global landscape becoming increasingly complex and treacherous in so many ways. In the incipient digital age, disparate information and wide-ranging points of view abounded, but serious, thorough, independent *newsgathering* did not. This gutting of newsrooms had been occurring not just in the U.S. and Canada but throughout the world. And it became painfully obvious that there was a diaspora of hundreds upon hundreds of talented investigative reporters and editors with nowhere to work.

Both journalism and democracy desperately needed new economic models to support and deliver investigative reporting, as well as a place to explore and incubate new platforms and approaches. And that is precisely why in late 2007, I proposed the creation of the Investigative Reporting Workshop, as a project of the American University School of Communication in Washington, D.C. By the spring of 2009, the workshop, to be funded by the university and by philanthropic foundations and individuals, was approved and staffed and had begun publishing original, online, multi-media investigative stories, prepared by veteran journalists working closely with students.

It was and remains an attempt to enlarge the public space for this kind of crucial work, but it was only the beginning. The mission for the workshop included a research effort—to explore new models for supporting investigative journalism beyond individual, independent reporting centers. For more than two years, I consulted and mulled with media thinkers. I began to conceive of a global investigative news service—a

network of preeminent journalists and major news organizations that would chronicle the uses and abuses of power.

For me, the idea had an intellectual firmament and provenance dating back to at least 1992. After eleven years at ABC News and then *60 Minutes*, I quit, and in 1989 founded a nonprofit, investigative-reporting organization called the Center for Public Integrity, which I led for its first fifteen years. In late 1992, Victor Navasky, then the editor of *The Nation* (and now chairman of this magazine), invited me to speak at an international investigative-journalism conference in, of all places, Moscow, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. In attendance were reporters from around the world, laboring under vastly different conditions and cultural mores, but all deeply committed to exposing the truth. The drama and the life-and-death dimension of this experience struck a deep chord in me that resonates to this day. I realized there was a huge opportunity, and a public need, to extend internationally the methodical modus operandi of the Center for Public Integrity.

It took me five long years to develop the concept, and in late 1997, the center's International Consortium of Investigative Journalists began formal operation. It was the first working network—one hundred people in fifty countries—of some of the world's most respected investigative reporters developing stories across borders.

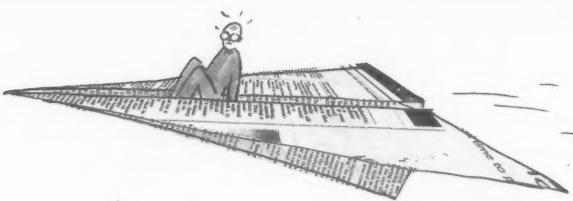
Consortium stories exposed such issues as illegal cigarette-smuggling by the major manufacturers, the privatization of water, and U.S. war contracts in Iraq and Afghanistan (that one won the first George Polk Award for Internet reporting in 2004). Structurally, though, the consortium had never been robustly funded and its important projects were so epic, intricate, and expensive that it was difficult to do more than one or two a year.

Nonetheless, nonprofit initiatives such as this enabled high-quality journalism that otherwise wouldn't have been possible, and by 2008, nonprofit publishers of investigative reporting throughout the U.S. were raising and spending at least \$20 million annually—an unprecedented development in U.S. history that reflected the vacuum created by old commercial media's abrogation of this work. But this was nothing compared to what emerged in the ensuing five years: dozens of new nonprofit muckraking organizations at the local, state, and national level were able to obtain funding and begin publishing important work. Suddenly, \$20 million raised and spent annually became \$40 million, in the U.S. alone. Around the world, meanwhile, dozens of investigative journalism training organizations, such as Investigative Reporters and Editors in the U.S., continued to grow.

This extraordinary investigative connectivity and ferment were auspicious, and continue to spawn new energy and creativity today. The missing elements, though, were a global, online, social-utility platform, in which the best investigative journalists in the world could publish their original work, and

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CHARLES LEWIS, a former *60 Minutes* producer who founded The Center for Public Integrity, is a MacArthur Fellow and the founding executive editor of the new Investigative Reporting Workshop at the American University School of Communication in Washington.



a new financial support system to make that possible. The looming question gnawing away at me was: How to create an economic model that would achieve much greater editorial output annually, with a much larger and sustained audience, via publishing partnerships and the Web? For that, a new entity was clearly needed.

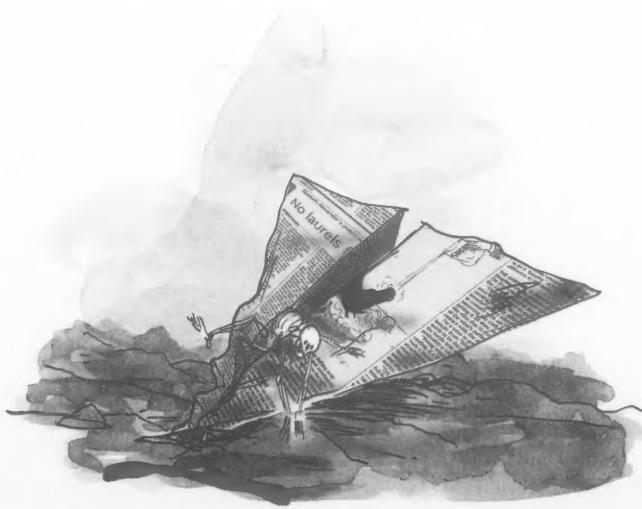
One of the most encouraging developments around this time was the late-2008 launch by Politico of a new content-and revenue-sharing network, in which more than one hundred clients, including sixty-seven newspapers, were signed up in just three months. Clients of the new Politico Network also got access to Reuters news stories, which helped the London-based company achieve greater market penetration in the U.S. Separately, CNN began its own wire service to tap into The Associated Press's restless newspaper-client base. After all the newsroom devastation, by late 2008, many individual newspapers and TV stations had begun to realize that they couldn't function without some basic national reporting content—but they needed it without having to shoulder the related overhead. Did that also mean there might be a public yearning for investigative reporting, both here and around the world? Thankfully, we now know, it did.

As Richard Gingras, who has helped to start many new media ventures, including Salon, and who was at the time a senior adviser on various product initiatives at Google, sagely pointed out when we first began to discuss how to make such a thing happen: old-model investigative journalism

was typically subsidized by other, less-expensive types of news content—wires, sports, lifestyle content in newspapers, or interviews on *60 Minutes*. The new model was going to require not only multiple revenue streams, but some rethinking on the cost side as well. At the same time, it also was not clear to me if the U.S. philanthropic community had the interest or the capacity to support a much more costly international venture.

WITH ALL OF THIS IN MIND, IN LATE 2009, I BEGAN WORLD Investigative Reporting Enterprises (WIRE), a global gateway to investigative journalism—a multimedia platform for the best original stories by some of the best journalists in the world, commissioned by, reported, written, edited, and published or produced for WIRE. The privately owned company includes investors who are socially committed to this work and who don't expect 20-plus percent annual profits—people I know personally and trust.

As much as possible, WIRE coverage has illuminated macro, not micro, patterns about power. The point of view reflects a global, not local, perspective. After all, this was the first global muckraking portal, and therefore it should *not* be U.S.-centric in tone or outlook, despite the physical location of the core staff in Washington. By the end of 2013, we were publishing in Spanish, French, Chinese, and Arabic, as well as English.



WIRE stories include video, audio, text, graphics, and searchable databases. We recognized that rapidly evolving digital technologies required a rethinking of the form and structure of journalistic work. To respond to more frenetic behaviors in news consumption, we created a layered pyramid of content, from a narrative overview to breaking updates, from video reports to databases of background detail, from maps and satellite imagery to illuminating charts and graphs. You could say we were applying the long-tail theory to journalism, which, as Gingras noted, "allowed us to create living resources that continue to change well beyond our initial publication dates, letting us include additional postings by our own reporters, rebuttals and corrections by our readers, and secondary analysis by interested experts and third parties."

By the end of 2011, WIRE had a full-time staff of twenty. Additionally, we had five consulting regional editors and 150 premier investigative journalists from seventy-five countries, each paid a respectable, annual contributing writer fee plus a potential revenue share of annual profits. In its first full year of operation, 2010, WIRE lost money, as we expected. By 2011, however, it turned a 2.6 percent annual profit, and by the end of 2013 profits were at 5 percent. By then, we had accumulated one thousand media partners throughout the world, using a syndication model in which content is exchanged for online page views, which WIRE then uses to sell advertising—with a share of that advertising income paid back to the partner site. Revenue is derived from advertising and reader donations. The latter has vastly exceeded our expectations. Thousands of civic-minded individuals became so excited by the historic nature of WIRE and the public service it provides that they became reader-contributors, what we call WIRE Associates—crowd-funding by credit card, not for an individual project or subject area, but for the entire operation.

When WIRE officially launched, the central question in the news business was whether online ad revenue would ever be sufficient to sustain serious reporting. But by 2012—boosted by President Obama's national Broadband Initiative—broadband access in America had increased by a remarkable 40 percent, which, of course, energized advertisers.

But before we could take advantage of that, we had to figure out how WIRE would drive page views. We realized that a reconsideration of how the Web drives audience was in order. It wasn't any longer about the "instance" of readership or viewing in the old-media model, but the "persistence" of availability and search-engine access. This is where the creation of our "living resources" investigative material began to bear fruit. It supported better search-engine rankings and stimulated new forms of interaction. It generated visits long after the original publication of a given article, visits that resulted not only in greater consumption, but also further discussion, collaboration, and contribution. It gave readers a sense of ownership, a stake in the work we were producing.

Another epiphany for me was recognizing that most investigative reporting falls into specialized subjects or themes—corruption, human rights, energy and the environment, inter-

national security, health and safety, etc. Each of those subject areas is of interest to vast, worldwide social networks of reasonably well-educated and well-informed people—cumulatively, tens of millions of people. Until the creation of WIRE, none of those communities had access to such high-quality, anthologized information. Now these vast networks became both specialized markets for the work of WIRE's international cadre of reporters—exponentially increasing WIRE's Web traffic—and pathways to new information resources, crowd-sourced experts, and potential citizen muckrakers.

This social-network strategy actually became more feasible in 2010 when we launched, within WIRE, the Global Reporting and Investigative Track, a searchable aggregation of the most recent, credible investigative journalism from around the world, as well as the significant public government and nongovernmental investigative findings—congressional and corporate reports, studies by NGOs, etc. It's collected using computer technologies, and by enlisting thousands of knowledgeable, concerned people in the various social networks we've partnered with on six continents to help us construct a free, searchable, ever-expanding archive. This living database, in addition to the original investigative reporting by WIRE, has proven to be immensely appealing to people around the world, and has helped to vastly enlarge the audience and appetite for quality investigative journalism.

A. J. Liebling famously said, "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one." While unable to duplicate the 100 percent employee ownership offered by David Lawrence to his journalists at the Bureau of National Affairs more than sixty years ago, WIRE has redefined and markedly improved the economic reality and future prospects for investigative reporters and their crucial work. More to the point, it has provided a global platform for exposing the most significant public and private abuses of power in the world.

It didn't seem possible.

## Old Hands, New Voice

*How NGOs learned to do news*

BY CARROLL BOGERT

NEW YORK, 2014—Back in 2009, the future of international reporting looked bleak indeed. Several big U.S. newspapers had shut down their foreign bureaus altogether. The American TV networks had basically shrunk their international presence to London. Covering the Iraq war had nearly bankrupted foreign-news budgets, and by then, the American public had lost interest in the Iraq war. Or indeed in foreign news at all, a lot of the time. It was tough being the most expensive and least read story in the queue. Like a faded diva in a ratty mink stole ("Oh, this old thing? I bought it on

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CARROLL BOGERT is associate director of Human Rights Watch. From 1986–1998, she was a foreign correspondent for *Newsweek* in China, Southeast Asia, and the Soviet Union.

assignment covering Brezhnev"), foreign correspondents slunk from the stage, costly and unwanted.

Yet even then you could have spied a few positive trends. First, the basic cost of international fact-gathering and distribution had fallen precipitously. Cameras and recorders were absurdly cheap and the means of transmission cheaper still. (Marx might have called it a revolution in the means of production.) Then, too, it was finally dawning on everyone that the United States was rapidly growing more international by almost every measure: the percentage of American businesses with interests overseas (and what was "American" business anymore anyway?), the percentage of the American population born in another country, the percentage of Starbucks customers buying the "World Music" CD at the cash register. You still couldn't sell *People* magazine at the newsstand with Uganda's Yoweri Museveni on the cover, maybe, but international news was locating an audience. Why were the BBC and *The Economist* moving into a market here if one didn't exist?

A disproportionate number of media executives back in 2009 had been foreign correspondents in their glory days, of course, but even they had to admit that those days hadn't necessarily been all that glorious. No one could quite remember Walter Cronkite's last story about Burundi, back in the days when the American media were supposedly doing such a boffo job covering the world. And everyone had to admit that it was a lot easier finding out something about Burundi in 2009 than it had been back in, say, 1963. A lot of world news went uncovered, and unread, even in the glory days.

Fortunately, foreign correspondents were not alone. Alongside them on beats from Chechnya to Congo to the mountains of Nepal, an army of human-rights investigators, academic researchers, aid workers, and country experts of various kinds were also out there gathering facts. They didn't get interviews with the prime minister very often, and they didn't always feel it necessary to quote the brigade commander insisting his men had nothing to do with that massacre in that village. But sometimes they had more expertise than the journalists who stole their insights, lifted their research, and quoted them in paragraph seventeen. The Internet, meanwhile, changed the game.

For thirty years, Human Rights Watch had been sending its researchers on missions around the world to investigate and report on issues of serious human-rights abuse. Those researchers had been churning out worthy reports couched in dense legalese—more like case files, intended for a specialist audience (the National Security Council expert on Central Asia, say, or the UN peacekeeping staff) than reportage meant for the general public. But HRW started giving the press a run for its money in 2009, hiring experienced journalists for a new multimedia unit whose job it was, essentially, to report on the work of HRW. By early 2009, some sixty thousand pages were being viewed on the organization's Web site every day. That traffic compelled HRW to speak in terms the public could understand. If the journalists weren't going to cover those stories, then HRW, like other nongovernmental organizations, would have to do so itself. The organization had dozens of investigators covering more than seventy countries—more

than the foreign correspondent corps of either *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*. It lacked the journalistic muscle to turn its research into digestible information products—until grants from private donors gave it the means to attract experienced professionals from an industry that no longer valued them.

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Some aid workers had more expertise than the journalists who stole their insights and quoted them in graph seventeen.

Now war photographers who could no longer snag an assignment from *Time* or *Newsweek* went on mission with HRW researchers. They shot video as well, and handed it over to a team of editors back at the Empire State Building in New York. Staff researchers were issued high-quality audio recorders to use when interviewing survivors of human-rights abuse, and former radio reporters assembled the audio files into powerful testimonies. The new HRW Web site ([hrw.org](http://hrw.org)) modeled itself on the BBC, with four prominent multimedia stories on the homepage and a clickable list, organized by geography and topic, with the latest information on human rights from dozens of countries. The day after the presidential inauguration saw homepage news on Obama's decision to halt the military commission hearings at Guantánamo Bay (where HRW had two staffers at the proceedings); an Israel-Gaza package including a Q&A on the complex issues of civilian casualties and international humanitarian law, an audio interview with HRW's researcher on the ground, and a lengthy briefing paper on the humanitarian situation in Gaza; and a piece on the murder of Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya's lawyer. The audience for this material went beyond HRW's own Web site. Because the mainstream media wouldn't pick up whole stories edited and distributed by an advocacy group, HRW also made it available in disaggregated form. Radio reporters could pull a quote off the site and stitch it into their own stories. TV producers could use video shot by HRW in the field, mix it with a little stock footage or some wire shots, and create a foreign-news piece from the field without ever leaving midtown Manhattan. And media companies were getting less choosy about where they got their stories from, anyway. For sure, the price was right: HRW gave its content away for free.

*But it isn't journalism!* cried the stalwart defenders of the sacred flame. And they were right. But it wasn't exactly a video news release sneaked onto local TV news by the Bush White House, either. The origins of Human Rights Watch's material were clearly marked, not least because it wanted the publicity.

The idea caught fire. Within several months, other

nonprofit research groups saw the value in producing their own digestible information products—dare not call it journalism!—and before long, they banded together to create economies of scale. Rather than replicating multimedia capability across a number of NGOs, they formed a consortium to report on the work of them all. This news service leveraged the expertise within the nonprofit sphere to feed the mainstream media with high-quality international content, to inform the public about what was happening in the world, and to cycle multimedia content back to the NGOs themselves, for use on their own sites or with their own donors. A board of overseers watched over the journalistic integrity of the product. And an open forum on the service's Web site meant that no NGO could purvey a false or inflated storyline without the possibility of public challenge.

In 2014, just as in 2009, the public continues to hold the media in low esteem, right down there with businessmen and politicians. The nongovernmental sector, meanwhile, still enjoys higher approval ratings than any of them. What we learned is that readers don't trust the information less because it doesn't come from the mainstream media. They trust it more.

The survivors transformed themselves into true multi-media operations, with a core editorial group publishing via newsprint, mobile, the Web, and of course the foldable electronic readers that are the latest rage. Their video and audio reports are often indistinguishable from the work done by companies that started out in broadcasting, which have gone through their own shakeups.

The Web-first shift at the *Monitor* happened shortly after I became its editor—and just as the paper celebrated its hundredth anniversary. It has been something of a struggle ever since. We expected media wise guys to take shots at us. There would be the inevitable HAPPY 100TH; GOODBYE, MONITOR headlines. Some skeptics contended that all the *Monitor* was doing was masking a money-saving retreat.

Of course, it is true that the move from five days a week to one was intended to save money. The *Monitor*'s daily print edition had not been profitable for decades. With a circulation of fifty thousand and an annual subscription price of \$240, the paper required a multimillion-dollar subsidy from the Christian Science church each year to keep publishing.

Still, moving toward a sustainable business model was important not just for our benefactor but also for the newsroom. Sustainability would end the annual hat-in-hand ritual and promote editorial independence. Moreover, it was evident to everyone by the first few years of the twenty-first century that almost all news organizations would have to make the leap out of print sooner or later. We chose sooner.

Not entirely, however. Despite falling advertising, we wanted to retain longtime print subscribers and thought we might find some modest growth in a reduced-frequency, ten-by-twelve-inch magazine/newspaper hybrid. Our weekly was a risk, but for our own reasons, we saw it as a necessary transitional product.

Here is the five-year plan we developed back in 2008: a big improvement in our traffic by 2014. Traffic analysis told us that aggregators and people using search engines liked our individual articles but that, like most news operations, we had a hard time converting the one-time visitor into a return visitor who lingered. Our goal was to quintuple page views—then five million a month—in five years. At a conservatively estimated CPM (cost per thousand impressions), we calculated, our operation would then be on a path to sustainability.

So our site needed to be more compelling. We knew there was no magic bullet for that beyond what has always worked in journalism: high-quality reporting and analysis, relevant to readers and timely in publication. We had to free our reporters and editors from the industrial shackles of print and energize our site. With print, everything was organized around and funneled into our daily deadline. The Web is like the old UPI motto: a deadline every minute. As our reporters, editors, photographers, and graphics artists began to understand the rhythms of Web usage, we learned techniques that helped pieces succeed: we honed our headlines, timed our posts, streamlined our site, and practiced linking diplomacy with other sites to build traffic.

And with the print-first paradigm dead, our approach to journalism changed. The Web is really about interaction, and that meant conversation, citizen journalism, and other

## Unchaining the Monitor

*How an early Web-first strategy worked out*

BY JOHN YEMMA

BOSTON, 2014—In October 2008, *The Christian Science Monitor* announced it was shifting to a “Web-first, multiplatform strategy.” The bulk of our international reporting resources, we said, would be devoted to our Web site, CSMonitor.com, on a 24/7 basis, and print would go from daily to weekly. Smaller newspapers had made similar changes, but the *Monitor*, while not a giant among circulation leaders, was the biggest name to do so at the time.

Not that plenty of people weren’t ringing alarm bells about print back then. David Morgan, a longtime media executive and a board member of the Belo Corporation, warned that a hard rain was about to fall: “Newspapers,” he declared at a new media conference in October ’08, “prepare for disassembly.”

Indeed, the years following the financial panic of 2008–2009 were devastating. Every media company was shaken and some are still spiraling downward—yearly revenue eroding, layoffs resulting, erosion resuming. Five years later a lot of the great names in newspapering are gone, their brands retired or flying atop Web-only operations, their brick and mortar sold by Chapter 11 receivers. Just as old-timers wistfully recall the *New York Herald Tribune*, *The Washington Star*, and the *Dallas Times Herald*, two dozen more mastheads have fallen since 2009, and another dozen or so just don’t know it’s coming yet.

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JOHN YEMMA, a former deputy managing editor of *The Boston Globe*, is editor of *The Christian Science Monitor*.

forms of reader/user involvement. Everybody was trying that back in 2009, of course, but doing it right meant closely tending reader involvement and creating a community that amplified the *Monitor's* capabilities rather than just acting as a sounding board or a forum for mindless chatter.

An aha! moment occurred when we shed the last of the industrial publishing process. The *Monitor* brand, we realized, was the real value of our business. We had pedigree, a skilled staff, and a fan base. And so, starting in mid-2009, we began to look around the Web and find others who shared our mission to illuminate the human dimension behind global events, others looking for solutions to global problems like CO<sub>2</sub> emissions or the oppression of minorities. The *Monitor* brand, we realized, could act as a kind of umbrella under which a federation of blogs, small sites, and individual journalists could be organized.

Staking our future to Web traffic brought problems as well.

Like everyone, we had to downsize in making the adjustment from five-day print to Web-first plus one-day print. It was modest, but it was painful. We said goodbye to some old pros and were not able to hold onto some rising stars. We lost bench depth, and it would be a lie to say that didn't hurt. We couldn't cover as many subjects as we once could.

We had an ongoing newsroom conversation (we are a polite place; elsewhere this would be called an argument) about the proper form of *Monitor* journalism on the Web. Just as in print we had to learn to modulate what we were doing—to do stories that would be popular enough to stay relevant, yet to pursue our own sense of what story was important based on our editorial judgment. We found that we could still dare to be dull, especially if our overall Web traffic was building and we were bringing in revenue. But the truth is that we think twice about the DBIS, those pieces that are Dull But Important. And I sometimes wonder whether the handful of people who used to read those DBIS, now so rare, might not have gotten something especially valuable from them, perhaps understanding an issue or a culture for the first time. As one of the foreign correspondents says in Tom Stoppard's 1978 play *Night and Day*, "Information is light. Information, in itself, about anything, is light." So you hate to lose light.

Yet with continuous updates and with what I consider our unique approach to global news and perspective, we have established a following, built a community, and generated sufficient traffic to bring in the advertising revenue necessary to keep us going. Can prosperity be right around the corner?

When the daily print newspaper died, we lost an icon, a lovely tangible thing that leaves ink on your fingers, lets you unfold it in a cafe, toss it down on a desk for dramatic effect, or tear out an article and pin it to a bulletin board. A photo hanging on my office wall shows a skinny, T-shirt-clad John Kennedy studying an article in the *Monitor* while Jackie, in a summer blouse with big polka dots, reads over his shoulder. It must have been the mid-1950s. The world was young.

Those days are gone. Still, I'm hoping one day to see a photo of Barack and Michelle Obama poring over an article

on our Web site or peering at one of our pieces on that cool new foldable version of the BlackBerry.

## So Cool

*How a weather map changed the climate*

BY ADAM DAVIDSON

WASHINGTON, D.C., 2014—The economic weather map, which started out as a gimmick, changed everything. It showed us how the old stuff—good stories told by professional reporters—could live happily alongside all the new: user-generated content, data mash-ups, discussion forums, Twitter feeds, and all that.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Back on September 6, 2008, NPR launched Planet Money, a team of radio and multimedia journalists producing a podcast, blog, Web site, and ongoing radio stories. Planet Money's mission was to make clear a torrent of economic and business news. Our theory was that many Americans were eager to understand how economics and business affected their lives, but found much business reporting too jargon-filled and confusing. It was coincidental that we launched on the day that the U.S. and world economies, effectively, broke down. The first few months were wild. By mid-2009 we could, occasionally, catch our breath, and that's when we put together the economic weather map.

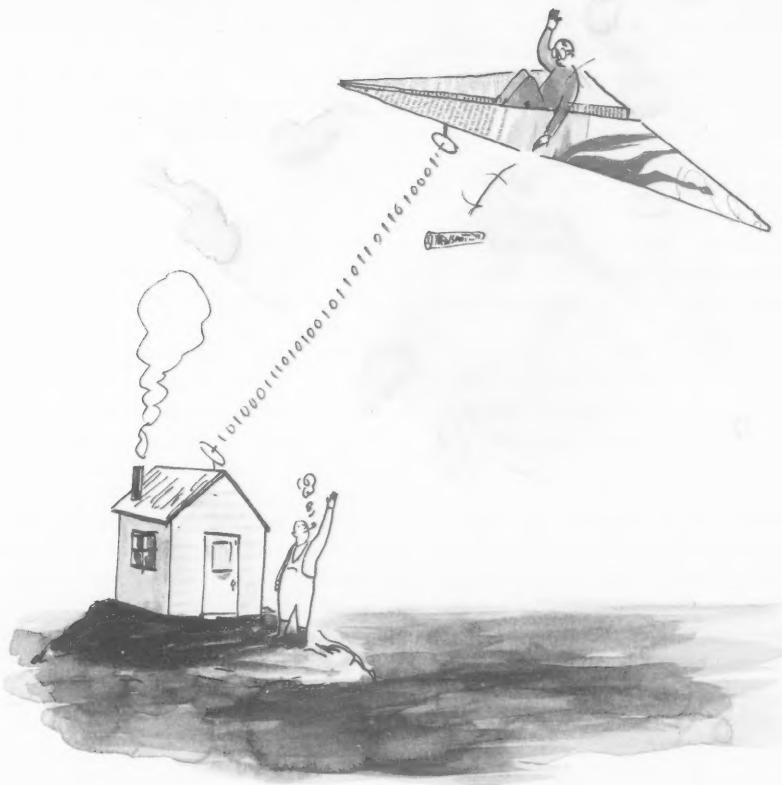
The map was supposed to be somewhat simple: a full-color, fun-to-look-at, easy-to-use replica of the world which could show, in rich USA Today colors, just how the economy was doing. Areas with lots of job loss would be in red, the high-growth areas (there weren't many in those first years) would be in blue.

Pretty soon we realized how much more fun it would be to make the map personal. If I'm a dentist in Akron, what did I care about the job security of computer programmers in San Jose? We wanted users to be able to enter their zip code (or the equivalent outside the U.S.), age, profession, education level, gender, etc., and then see how people like them are doing around the country and around the world. They could zoom in on their city or their neighborhood and compare themselves to the Joneses next door; or they could quickly compare their salary to dentists or computer programmers in Paris or Mumbai or Srinagar.

This was not easy, of course. It meant putting a bunch of journalists used to anecdotal, narrative reporting in the same room as a bunch of information architects and computer-assisted reporters used to massive sets of government data. But once we had it up and running, everybody was happy. The interactive map was just so cool: enter your profession and you instantly saw employment rates and average salaries around the U.S. and the world; enter your zip code and you could see employment rates and levels of

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ADAM DAVIDSON, editorial director for NPR's *Planet Money* project, reports on business and economics for the network's national desk.



bankruptcy and other economic indicators in your county, city, or neighborhood. Interested in trade? You could see global-trade flows. No longer would you have to wonder how circumstances in China or India, say, were having an impact on your job. You could see, in full color, exactly how much money companies in your area were paying for outsourcing services or imported goods.

It was cool, but not yet a work of journalism. It was all pull and no push. The users had infinite ability to play around but no guidance, no broad narrative to help them understand how the world economy works and how it's changing.

The discussion boards and the videos that our audience provided confirmed our sense of failure. There was no overriding view of the world, simply thousands of individuals who had used the map to confirm and strengthen opinions they already had. A disgruntled computer programmer used the map to prove that people in India and the Czech Republic had "stolen my job," while others used the same data set to show that global trade was an uncomplicated and unambiguous positive for all Americans. Soon, the discussions and the user-generated content devolved into a screaming match among unbending ideologues.

All along, we had hoped that our economic news service would do the opposite: it would create a forum for reasonable, thoughtful discussion and debate, informed not by the Internet's typical violent animal spirits but by respectful consideration of a shared set of facts.

We decided to show the audience "the truth," since it didn't seem capable of finding it on its own. We took back the control of our weather map and created narrative stories out of the data. We made something distinctly old media, even if it used new-media tools—a series of "data stories" in which the audience pushed one button and got the equivalent of a high-school filmstrip: a world map with big red arrows and a voice-of-God narrator explaining exactly how the world economy works. It was authoritative, objective, and completely boring. Our audience fled. We had overcorrected. We were miserable.

In that early period, we thought we only had two choices: embrace new media and create a forum for cranky extremism with none of the perspective provided by professional journalism, or ignore new media and just tell old-fashioned stories with no audience interaction.

Yet, we began to wonder: Isn't there an audience that wants what we want—intelligent, informed discussion? We couldn't get rid of the cranks, but we could reward the thoughtful. So: we gave the audience the tools to create their own data-driven narrative. Each person could more rigorously show how his own life—his profession or his neighborhood or his financial situation—fit in the context of the global economy. People could create their own personal documentary, complete with—we hoped—some journalistic balance.

We provided access to the data and a whole suite of new tools—map mash-ups, intuitive information design, video

and audio archives, do-it-yourself animation—which allowed anybody to create a simple, but pretty awesome, narrative. Some were cartoons; some were videos; some were audio or text; some were simple PowerPoint displays. The more ambitious had plenty of room to expand. An easy, standards-based format meant that the personal stories could be as elaborate as the audience wanted, and expert users could create their own data mash-up tools and then share them with the rest of the community. A novice could create a basic story in ten or twenty minutes. Others spent months perfecting theirs.

Since NPR is the ultimate hyper-local company—a big, national network with hundreds of local partner stations—it was natural that user groups opened around the country. We soon were seeing group-developed economic histories of Akron, Ohio, and Logan, Utah. Some member stations began hosting discussion sessions on economic issues that had been raised by the project; they would invite active users onto local talk shows to share what they had learned.

The level of user activity is what you'd expect: most visitors don't create anything; they just browse; most of what is created is of interest only to those closely linked to the creator, while a few are true masterworks. Some of the mini-documentaries are less than a minute long and tell one specific story—the history of one neighborhood, for example, or one company. Others run more than an hour and have sweeping narratives spanning centuries and continents. A history of the sock industry, for instance, was particularly fascinating, taking the viewer to ancient Rome, medieval England, colonial Massachusetts, mid-century North Carolina, and contemporary China and Pakistan.

Each element of each documentary is keyword-coded, so someone, say, creating an economic portrait of Pittsburgh can quickly find homemade videos of retired steelworkers, charts about steel production, and user-generated tools. Every mini-documentary is connected to the central map that serves as the entryway and meeting place for the community, and where a first-time visitor can get a sense of what is available.

Through careful information-architecture design and by celebrating the best user-created content, we've been able to elevate the conversation. Users have rich, heated discussions about the exact causes and implications of controversial topics like outsourcing, immigration, and trade tariffs. When someone comes out with a strong but poorly argued attack, other users respond with a simple request: *show it with data or shut up* (SIWDSU is our favorite acronym).

Many of our early internal debates now seem quaint and odd. We would argue about the role of journalism—Does user-generated content replace us? Does it make us irrelevant? Not at all, we've learned. Our role seems quite clear. We have a staff of expert data-driven reporters who are constantly creating high-quality digital documentaries to go alongside our radio reports or to illuminate a breaking news story. For most of our users, this is an occasional pastime.

For us pros, it's our job. We do it all the time and, as a result, our stories are almost always better. Our training makes us better storytellers, better information-assimilators, and we have a richer understanding of the ethical requirements of

balance. In short, our work is professionally made. We clearly label which stories full-time professionals wrote and which stories they didn't, though in most cases it's not necessary. The amateur stuff often seems, well, amateurish and, alas, most of it still suffers from strong bias. That said, at least a few times a year, some fifteen-year-old creates something far better than anything we've produced.

Perhaps the greatest surprise is how helpful the site is on days with fast-breaking news. We often find that some user has already created a mini-documentary about the bank or official or country that is suddenly in the spotlight. If the user's content is good enough, we highlight it. If it's not quite up to our standards, we can work with the user to develop it. If no user has yet created a mini-documentary, we only have to wait a bit. By the end of the day, someone will.

We now have a full-service news site. Users can find out what happened and they can quickly get our take on the news. They can also access a rich trove of narratives to place the news in context. They can even create their own mini-documentaries to reflect on what the news means. If they think we're biased, they can make an informed, data-based argument. If they think we've missed something, they can tell us what it is and see if we bite. Journalism has never been stronger.

Now all we have to do is figure out how to make some money off of this thing.

## The New Niche

*How tax incentives and technology came to the rescue*

BY DAVID S. BENNAHUM

WASHINGTON, D.C., 2014—By 2009, we were at an impasse. The news business—newspapers in particular—was collapsing, and there was no obvious way to reconstitute it as a *business* that was capable of providing serious public-interest journalism. Paradoxically, though, the collapse of newspapers as a viable business didn't reflect a collapse in the public desire for quality news.

We can rightly blame the convergence of portable computers and the Internet for this collapse. Real-time statistics on who is reading what, and when, revealed to advertisers, for the first time, the true scope and engagement of the news audience. The printed page had provided no such information, and that had allowed publishers to overcharge for their inventory—the display of the ad, not the actual reading of the ad, drove revenue. With no leverage to negotiate a better deal, advertisers had accepted this state of affairs. But by 2009, this was the reality from an advertiser's perspective: real-time statistics on their consumption of ads that often showed a stunningly low return on investment and an oversupply of

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DAVID S. BENNAHUM is president and CEO of the Center for Independent Media, which publishes six news sites in the public interest. Additional information on the Center and its programs can be found at [www.newjournalist.org](http://www.newjournalist.org).

Web pages providing advertising inventory. The balance of power shifted to advertisers. As a result, online advertising generated a fraction of the revenue, per reader, that print advertising once had generated.

In recent generations, Americans had been conditioned to believe in the infallibility of market forces. We would glibly

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## The press's most vital and expensive functions had been sacrificed on the altar of laissez-faire capitalism.

say, "The market has spoken," followed by its corollary, "Let the market sort it out." Yet the free press occupies a special place in our culture and civilization. It's the fourth branch of self-government. Without it, how can the public be educated on the great (and small) issues of our time?

The press—or at least its most vital, and most expensive, functions—had been sacrificed on the altar of laissez-faire capitalism. What remained were largely the amplifiers of news: cable, most radio, and the Internet aggregators and blogs that repackaged and riffed on the news and information produced by the small handful of serious outlets that continued to invest in newsgathering. In this information ecosystem, propaganda masquerading as news found a ready pathway. The beast had to be fed. The public's ability to shape coherent public policy suffered.

Small bands of bloggers and citizen journalists gamely tried to fill the void. And from time to time they did, breaking original news of significance. They weren't paid (or weren't paid much), however, and thus the key ingredient required to describe a profession was missing: money.

In 2009, the Center for Independent Media was an exception to this rule, one of a handful of organizations producing daily news at the local and national level, through six state-based Web sites that married the speed and intimacy of blogs with the discipline and ambition of investigative journalism. We had, on a good month, over a million visitors through the network, and were positioned to expand to new states in the coming years. Our goal was to become the leading independent online news network in the public interest, by building a network of state sites and a national news site in Washington, D.C., capable of covering the workings of government, politics, and the issues driving public debate. We believed that Congress would never charter an online corporation like PBS or NPR, and that a certain segment of the news-consuming public would nonetheless crave its online equivalent: a trusted source of news, independent of corporate control, valued precisely because it was nonprofit. This was the niche we aimed to fill, and we did so, at first using a combination

of private philanthropy and reader support.

Even as our audience grew, it was clear that the technology we used to deliver the news was unsatisfactory. Computers and mobile devices in those days didn't have the ease of use of paper. Consuming electronic news remained relatively demanding—something that generally happened tethered to a desk or on a small hand-held screen. We were crossing the chasm from one technology to another at a painfully slow pace. Thus the critical need for philanthropy in this nascent period. At the time, it wasn't clear that philanthropy would be up to the task of keeping public-interest journalism afloat until the technological gap closed and advertising returned to a level that would again begin to cover the journalistic costs. But it was.

The willingness of people with great wealth to support the news marked a return, in a sense, to the nineteenth century. Moguls with an agenda, liberal or conservative, began to fold public-service journalism into their array of media interests, for the purpose of influencing the direction of the country. We saw this in fledgling form in 2008, with Herb and Marion Sandler funding ProPublica. Soon, there were others, primarily driven by a younger generation of millionaires and billionaires who had made their fortunes on the Internet.

It wasn't a panacea. Much of this philanthropy failed to trickle down to the local level. The workings of federal government were well reported, but local government remained dangerously undercover, creating the sorts of conditions in which political corruption could flourish. In late 2010, after heavy lobbying by a coalition of media companies led by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, Congress created tax incentives to contribute to news "trusts": news organizations and their advertisers had the option of reinvesting in nonprofit, public-service journalism, and enjoyed significant tax breaks for doing so. Through the tax code, the government indirectly subsidized the critical parts of public-service news that, on their own, had no way of turning a profit. This quadrupled the amount of philanthropic dollars available for serious journalism.

The Center benefited from this broader base, and the five years between 2009 and today were good to us, in part thanks to our local focus. We were right in forecasting that the audience would be a network of niche audiences, segmented by geography, interests, and ideology, and with the support of philanthropy, we were able to expand our network to ten more states, for a total of sixteen. In nearly all these states, the major dailies have radically downsized to online-only publications, or gone bankrupt and folded.

During those five years, more and more of our readers received our content through an evolving series of inexpensive, dynamic, handheld devices and readers. Each year brought screens that more closely resembled the experience of reading on paper—portable, foldable, flexible. The whole world needed this, and we merely piggybacked on the innovations. This portable medium permitted better targeting of highly valuable ads based on geography, along with retail history and demographic profiles. A coupon emerges on screen that is good for six hours at the nearest Starbucks for that low-fat Venti latte you love so much, and so forth.



We are all accustomed to this now, and find some advertising quite useful. This has driven the return of ad revenue that covers a reasonable part of our editorial expenses. While in 2009 we had seventy foundations providing 95 percent of our income, today advertising generates 20 percent. Reader donations supply another 20 percent, thanks to society's gradual embrace of charitable micropayments online, allowing the share of income covered by private philanthropy to stay at 60 percent.

The news itself, however, is fundamentally different from the apogee of the daily newspaper. A newspaper, with its daily cycle and deadlines, delivers news as a pulse—a discrete article, a discrete edition. Online news is a wave—it has no clear start or finish. And sharing is the name of the game. Linking to and referencing what others are saying has become an essential part of reporting. The days of pretending to ignore the competition are over. Credit those who break news and they will credit you in turn. New information drives everything. Reporting is the gold standard; reporting that breaks news is the currency that fuels growth, prestige, and audience. Those who comment wittily have little to offer; those that do the work of journalism feed the online ecosystem, and reap rewards.

The days of the omnibus newspaper were over by 2012. This has put public-interest journalism—which traditionally had been subsidized by real-estate, sports, and lifestyle sections—on life support. When you stripped those sections out and turned them into bloggy businesses, you left the core exposed: a virtuous section that is expensive and which, unbuffered by the softer stuff, terrifies advertisers who don't want to be seen as funding, say, an investigation of the president. Thus even today, public-interest journalism remains pitiful in scope.

The old guard was ill-equipped to lead the transition to this new era. Its notions of daily deadlines, balance as objectivity, and just-the-facts writing were never suited to the new reality. By 2012, the Internet offered a critical mass of literate and alienated news consumers the means to fact-check reports and self-organize against an increasingly discredited brand of "he said, she said" journalism, which placed the pursuit of balance over the pursuit of truth. Yet the old guard's legacy of fact-based reporting and investigation remain the bulwark against propaganda. That must be retained, along with a relentless pursuit of the truth. And that's what we at the CIM are trying to do.

Today, in early 2014, the Center finds itself in a reasonably strong position. We reach fifteen million people a month through our network of sixteen sites. Congress is considering further tax incentives to finance public-service journalism, which will likely add depth to the support for our work. A fledgling network of overseas reporters, managed in the same vein as our domestic reporters, promises another round of significant audience growth: the public is especially hungry for international news written for a U.S. audience, as nearly every American news organization has folded its overseas operations.

Yet the overall landscape for news remains bleak. Our work, and the work of a growing number of similarly focused

news outlets, can hardly fill the void left by the disappearance of hundreds of newspapers and their reporters. A new social contract is required, one that recognizes that a strong and independent press is crucial. The rapid decline of our journalism as a watchdog on the powerful is destabilizing our way of life, and we can't wait for the market to sort it out.

## No Profit, No Problem

*How a new city daily (on newsprint!) rolled*

BY MICHAEL STOLL

SAN FRANCISCO, 2014—With the collapse of the business model undergirding the tradition of muckraking journalism—and the double-digit profit margins it supplied—most newspapers that survived the last five years did so by cutting staff, eliminating coverage areas, and hyping easy-to-report fluff. In the process, many U.S. cities lost their civic watchdogs. After slashing hundreds of journalists, many newsrooms became increasingly frivolous and irrelevant. Witness these lead headlines from the January 2014 *San Francisco Chronicle*:

MACY'S FAB FASHION SHOW: DAY 6

PERFECT WAVES FOR 16TH ANNUAL SURF COMPETITION

MAN'S BEST FIEND: DOGS SNACKED ON VICTIMS  
OF NOB HILL DOUBLE MURDER

The *San Francisco Public Press* survived, however, by throwing out two assumptions deeply embedded in the DNA of corporate media. The first was the notion that newspaper owners had to make a profit. The second was that the journalism had to be subsidized by ads.

These insights helped this relatively new daily produce an increasingly powerful stream of quality journalism, with headlines like these:

CITY OVERPAID \$150 MILLION FOR WIND CONTRACT,  
RECORDS SHOW

POOR PATIENTS WAIT LONGEST IN AIDS-CURE ROLLOUT

GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE WORKERS WARN OF  
QUAKE WEAKNESS

What our profession discovered is that in the face of technological change, the ad market dried up much more rapidly than did readership. And also that these days, while many readers prefer to skim news sites for a small monthly fee on their iPhones, iPads, and iPads, demand for print did not disappear. In fact, as ad revenue plummeted, circulation revenue became an increasingly important piece of the shrinking pie. By 2010, circulation accounted for 40 percent of the average newspaper company's income, up

MICHAEL STOLL, a former reporter for The Philadelphia Inquirer and city editor for The San Francisco Examiner, is director of the Public Press Project, online at [www.public-press.org](http://www.public-press.org).

from 20 percent in the mid-1990s. So, despite the decimation of reporting staffs, newspapers' loyal and aging subscribers became significant financiers of journalism.

When I first touted the idea of starting a nonprofit, ad-free newspaper in 2008, traditional media mavens were dismissive. Yet, supported by a small group of idealistic journalists and nonprofit professionals in San Francisco, the *Public Press* evolved from an online-only venture to a multiplatform news organization with a robust Web presence and a thriving print edition.

The *Public Press* is able to compensate for lower revenues by dramatically cutting production costs. Without ads, our twenty-four-page broadsheet has the same newshole as a sixty-page *San Francisco Chronicle*, yet costs half as much to print. Because our paper weighs less, we can deploy news carriers on all-weather cargo bicycles, making our delivery operation inexpensive and environmentally friendly.

The key to the *Public Press*'s business model has been cross-media, content-sharing alliances with other independent and public-media ventures. These include local public radio and TV stations, ethnic and neighborhood papers, and a slew of local foundation-funded, Web-only news providers. Our favorite columns are condensed transcripts of public-radio talk shows on KQED-FM and KALW-FM in San Francisco, dispatches from the staff of the Center for Investigative Reporting in Berkeley, and blog and vlog posts by writers at New America Media, which aggregates the ethnic press. Front-page state, national, and international stories come not only from The Associated Press, but also the nonprofit *Christian Science Monitor*, National Public Radio, and its statewide radio counterpart, "The California Report."

Much like the ad-free *Consumer Reports* magazine, the *Public Press* is financed by the sale of papers (our print circulation is now fifty thousand on weekdays), supplemented by aggressive local fundraising drives and occasional foundation grants. At \$150 a year, a subscription (we call it a membership) costs one quarter of what the *Chronicle* charges. And the street price of 50 cents can't be beat. The *Chronicle* went up to \$2 in 2013.

With just twenty-five editorial staffers competing against the *Chronicle*'s sixty (less than a quarter the number it had in 2009, and one-tenth its peak in 2001), the *Public Press* would appear to be outgunned. But because we focus on public policy, economics, and social trends—and seldom cover sports, fashion, or random context-less crimes—we have developed a reputation as a credible source of important news. And while other papers still chase advertisers with elaborate Sunday sections devoted to new homes, wine, and automobiles, the *Public Press* focuses its coverage on rental housing, the environment, local arts, workplace safety, public health, transit, and reviews of consumer products and services aimed at people of all incomes and backgrounds. The classified ads we print are a free public service through a partnership with Craigslist.

That trust relationship with the audience, pioneered by public broadcasters such as PBS and NPR, has paid financial dividends, in the form of 35,000 memberships. It's only a start in a city of 750,000 and a region of more than seven million.

But the home-delivered paper is essentially just a premium membership benefit; anyone can view our work for free at [www.public-press.org](http://www.public-press.org).

It wasn't quick or easy to get to this point. In early 2009, we were able to leverage a seed grant from the San Francisco Foundation to hire a part-time editor to coordinate more than a dozen volunteer journalists to start producing local news on the Web. We followed in the footsteps of online nonprofit news ventures such as MinnPost in Minneapolis, GothamGazette in New York City, and VoiceofSanDiego, building an audience by covering our region's bread-and-butter issues.

By 2010, we'd raised a few hundred thousand dollars—enough to pay decent freelance rates and begin limited-run printings of our work to distribute in a few neighborhoods. In 2011, we ramped up to monthly, then weekly, while cajoling barely three thousand San Francisco residents to become member-subscribers.

The daily print launch in 2012 gave our reporters more cachet with sources. But it also allowed us to reach a whole

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## The key to our model is cross-media content sharing with public broadcasters, ethnic papers, and others.

new audience: the working-class population in San Francisco. Low-income folk are of little value to the luxury-goods advertisers targeted by traditional papers, and the Internet doesn't ameliorate this because even in 2014, a third of that segment of the population has limited or no broadband Internet access at home.

Five years ago, who'd have thought that you could view CNN in 3-D through your sunglasses or live video-chat from your wristwatch? But such technologies are still more expensive than a newspaper and can't be operated in the bathtub. And many of us who now rely on these gizmos have nonetheless sought to carve out some time offline. Like books, printed newspapers still have their place. Not only are most Baby Boomers still alive, but millions of them, newly retired, have more time to read.

Of course, we have a Web site that runs a twenty-four-hour HDTV Surround Sound City Council channel, and the standard Intelligent Agent, Suzy, who speaks plain English and guides archive searches. But it's our sober, in-depth, public-media-style approach to the journalism that distinguishes us on the screen and in the paper.

Our hope is to form a network—like the hundreds of local NPR affiliates—with other noncommercial news Web sites around the country that are planning to start print editions. But our main goal is to build a local media infrastructure that treats readers as citizens instead of merely consumers.

In 2009, when so many had given local journalism up for dead, it was difficult to stay dedicated to an idealistic vision of the media. Yet a handful of professionals who had come to see themselves as mission-driven public servants refused to let the bean counters tell them how to do their jobs. In the process, they reinvented the newspaper business.

## Rise of the Reader

*How books got wings*

BY PETER OSNOS

NEW YORK, 2014—Back in 2009, the headlines about book sales and the future of the publishing industry looked about as grim as those about newspapers and magazines. But as indicators about the book business, the headlines were misleading. Books were poised for a significant breakthrough, the beginning of an era of enormous, positive change.

Unlike other printed media, books do not have advertising, so there is none to lose. They do not have subscribers, so holding onto them is not an issue either. The main challenge is to manage inventory, making books available where, when, and how readers want them. And on that score, the advances in gadgetry and the changes in popular habits over the past decade, especially since 2009, have produced a major advance.

When we talk of a "book reader" now, we don't just mean a person, but a device. Stored in the device is a small collection of books and other reading material downloaded from bookseller offerings and libraries. We can, of course, still read books in the classical format, virtually unchanged since Gutenberg. When we're done with it, a book still becomes an artifact placed on a shelf, a reassuring way to honor the object and its author. With enough books, you can still turn almost any room into a place of warmth and style.

But in 2014, that option for reading is only one of many from which to choose. Even five years ago you could already read a book on your smart phone's screen, not to mention on early versions of handheld electronic machines like the Kindle. Or you could download the audio version of a book, for your commute or your exercise routine. If you wanted a printed book, but couldn't find it; but you could order a bound copy churned out from a machine that provided a cover and glued the spine—Voila! These print-on-demand machines soon became smaller and more efficient. And all of these technologies fed the biggest innovation of all—the rising belief by everyone in the publishing chain, from author to consumer, that readers should choose from several options of how to access a book, and they should be reasonably assured of finding it.

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PETER OSNOS, who is vice chairman of the Columbia Journalism Review, was foreign and national editor for The Washington Post. In 1997, after a dozen years at Random House, he founded PublicAffairs, an independent publishing company specializing in books of journalism, history, biography, and social criticism, where he is editor at large. He is executive director of The Caravan Project, funded by the MacArthur and Carnegie Foundations, which is developing a plan for multiplatform publishing of books.

Books contain stories, research, journalism, poetry, images; their function dates at least back to the cave paintings. What has evolved over time is the means of delivery. In the twentieth century, the advent of digital composition eliminated some of the machinery of bookmaking, but not the essential relationship between writer and text. In the twenty-first, the impact of technology on the content has mainly to do with the new ways readers can use books as research tools.

Now, links embedded in the text take you to definitions, explanations, and reference points, such as original documents. So the substance of the books—especially nonfiction narratives, investigative reports, and scholarship—is enhanced by the expanse of material beyond the page. Whatever form of book you are holding in your hand, you are, in effect, in the expanded universe of the author. A printed book comes with the reference materials available on the Web; a screen device can include all kinds of links; and the newest entry, what looks like paper but is powered by a chip and has downloading Wi-Fi capacity—all these enlarge that author's universe. Content is deeper, broader, and more easily updated than ever, yet it is still the domain of the writers who shape their own vision.

Content is the *sine qua non* of information. But it is distribution that provides the audience, and it is distribution that has undergone the most important transformation in the digital age.

At the middle of the last century, the cozy neighborhood bookstore began to be challenged by mall stores, owned by chains like Walden and Dalton, which introduced discounting and other marketing bells and whistles. The better independent booksellers responded by upgrading and expanding their inventory, producing “superstores,” such as Denver’s famous Tattered Cover, which has well over a hundred thousand titles, expert service, and in-store events. The chains—Barnes & Noble and Borders—soon adapted the superstore model, adding, for good measure, coffee bars. Book sales also moved into the “big box” stores such as Wal-Mart and Costco, but these sold a limited number of discounted titles and “deleted” any book that did not meet immediate sales expectations.

In the mid-1990s came the online retailers, especially Amazon, with millions of titles available in their virtual space, usually priced at a discount. This model emphasized efficiency, shipping books to consumers at amazing speed, even when the book required days to locate and send. (The traditional brick-and-mortar booksellers held to the convention that books could not be purchased until the items actually arrived in the stores, which meant that for many hard-to-find or unexpectedly fast-selling titles, customers had to make multiple forays before they were actually able to complete a purchase.) In those days, too, books were sold to retailers on consignment, and could be returned for full credit. By the early 2000s, well over 30 percent of all books on average were excess inventory, and for new titles, the figure was often as high as 50 percent. The waste of paper and manufacturing time, the costs related to packing and shipping, and the resulting glut of remaindered books—all this depressed profits.

That began to change after the 2008–2009 recession. As digital technology improved and devices for reading, listening,

or printing on demand became easier to use, readers caught on. So did publishers, who were eliminating the costs of paper, printing, binding, warehousing, and shipping, as well as the need to take a substantial reserve for unsold inventory. As a result, publishers could lower the price of books in certain formats, maintain them in others.

And after the predictable haggle with authors and agents, publishers devised a royalty structure that was reasonably fair to all. The settlement with Google back in 2008 had affirmed the principle that books under copyright could not be used without some compensation to their creators. That agreement made possible the scanning of millions of titles—a vast library of literature, scholarship, and journalism for libraries and buyers.

Bookstores, of course, found themselves adjusting to changing customer habits spurred by the convenience of online retailing. Key to this success was innovation that preserved the concept of the bookstore as a showroom and guide, not only to the printed books available for sale onsite, but to the vast and searchable catalogs of other titles housed in the storage facilities of wholesalers, which could be converted into e-books or print-on-demand books (as well as large-print versions or downloadable audio files). Booksellers again re-imagined their stores as destinations, places to engage in the time-honored pleasures of browsing and conversation, with reading and discussion groups, author visits, and a renewed commitment to customer service. More importantly, they can now sell you any book in any format, nearly instantly.

In fact, the principle that books of all kinds can be made so much more available in so many ways is what led to the renewal of publishing in the years following the deep recession of 2008 and 2009. It took a substantial measure of collaboration and entrepreneurial energy from all the participants in the book-writing, publishing, and selling process. The disorienting pace and the scale of change—combined with the debilitating skepticism toward technology so deeply embedded in book culture—were considerable deterrents to this renaissance.

But by 2014, perhaps out of necessity, these challenges were met. Book publishing proved again that if you provide the content that people want, in all the formats they want it, and at reasonable prices, the insatiable need for information and the power of stories will overcome obstacles to progress every time.

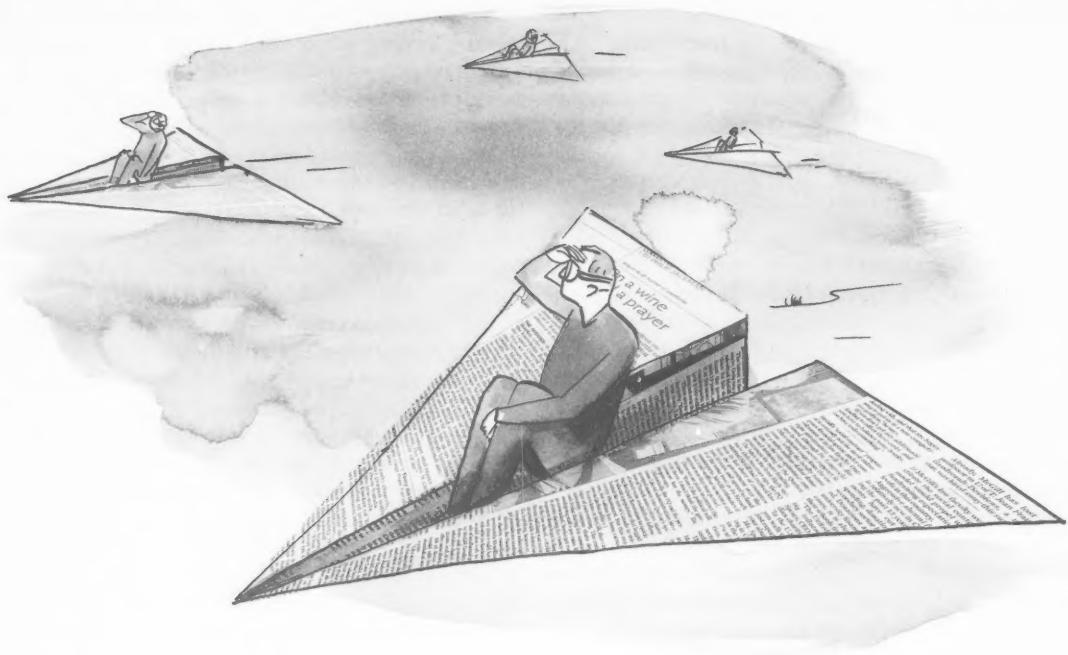
## Two Tents

*How Politico might work out. Or not.*

BY JOHN F. HARRIS

ARLINGTON, VA, 2014—The quirky assignment handed down by CJR’s editors—to imagine the future as though observing the past—brings to mind an old joke about the man who went to a psychologist complaining of strange dreams.

JOHN F. HARRIS is the editor-in-chief of Politico.



One night, he woke up having dreamed that he had turned into a teepee. The next night's dream was even more vivid: He had turned into a wigwam. The psychologist furrowed his brow. Then he announced: "I have figured it out. You are two tents!"

As the editor and a co-founder of Politico, I am not too tense. Since our publication launched online and in print in January 2007, we have prospered far beyond our early expectations. Fueled by intense interest in the 2008 presidential campaign, our traffic soared and we were regularly in the top dozen of *Editor & Publisher's* monthly listing of most-trafficked newspaper Web sites. Politico is growing by every measure that counts to me: newsroom size, traffic, ad revenue, journalistic reputation, and impact. Our strategy is to be in the top tier of news organizations covering Washington and national politics, and to do so as a self-sustaining, profit-generating business.

But this doesn't mean I sleep well. Like the man in the joke, I have anxiety dreams of my own. My visions of the future-past can be pleasant at times, and quite unsettling at others.

Let me take you inside my own version of Two Tents.

### Tent One

It is five years from now, early 2014, and Politico is a major player in the media covering Obama's second term. From

this vantage point, the fears and turmoil that beset the industry in 2008 and 2009 seem distant, even a little overwrought. Yes, there was agonizing retrenchment at many news organizations, but it was matched by impressive growth at other places.

Journalism is thriving in ways that only the most bullish—and seemingly Pollyannaish—voices were predicting five years ago. As some of the brashest bulls, those of us at Politico take particular satisfaction that we are among the success stories. We proved that niche publications, producing highly focused journalism for an audience with intense interest in particular subjects, can achieve the same ends—both editorially and financially—that in the past were the sole province of a handful of big newspapers and broadcast networks.

Politico is making money from advertisers who know we are read closely in Washington and by a politically sophisticated audience around the country and the world. We have a staff of eighty reporters and editors, roughly the size of *The New York Times's* Washington bureau during its glory days.

We do not have a network of reporters around the world; other publications have sprung up to meet that need. But that does not mean we don't leave the newsroom. We spent millions on travel over the past five years. What's more, in the old days, a lot of travel money got wasted—by reporters who wrote maybe one story, buried deep in the paper, after a week on the road. Since our audience is just like we are—political

junkies all—they have limitless appetite for our stories. I'll confess that I had been a skeptic of the craze for multimedia, but it turns out that our video dispatches from the road have been wildly popular. Our daily Web TV program started out a little cheesy, perhaps, but damned if it does not routinely get two hundred thousand viewers a day.

More important, our success as a business means we have the freedom to do longer, investigative and narrative work, rather than just chase the story of the day and the traffic that comes with it. Some people once believed that there would be no market for this kind of work in the new-media world, but our publisher, Robert Allbritton, bet against them, and he was right.

A lot of what people once feared, in fact, turned out not to be true. The media world that I grew up in, from the day I arrived as a summer intern at *The Washington Post* in 1985 at age twenty-one, is gone and I was very sorry to see it go. But it turned out the sky was not falling. The sun was rising.

## Tent Two

It's 2014, Obama is in his second term, and Politico is still here and managing to pay our bills—more than a lot of once-great news organizations can say. But I can't say I'm having a hell of a lot of fun. And the ability to have fun and have an impact at the same time was the reason I got into this business.

In retrospect, we probably were too cocky for our own good. We had such a good run in 2007 and 2008 that we assumed that growth and success would keep flowing. We did not appreciate that the same trend that made Politico possible in the first place—the massive fluidity and fragmentation of the news business—could cut the other way.

But the fragmentation never stopped. Now Politico is seeing its audience and ad market sliced up in the same way that battered the big legacy publications.

I also never would have guessed that the economy would stay in the dumps for five years. And the rates advertisers are paying for Web impressions are still pathetic. I hate to say it, but the Cassandras were right.

And it wasn't just some amorphous "bad environment" that put us in this position. We lost some of our edge. I well knew the hazards of newsroom culture—complacency and blah, addiction to outdated habits and bureaucratic routines. I had seen how this had dulled creativity during my years at *The Washington Post*, a newspaper I love. What stunned me was how quickly bad habits could develop at a new enterprise, or how hard they are to root out.

How's Politico doing in 2014? We are doing fine by most measures. But doing fine is not good enough. Constant innovation and clear thinking are the only salvation for the media in this chaotic new age.

## Reality Check

I'd like to depart from CJR's clever device and speak from the real-life perspective of 2009, not the imagined one of 2014. Politico was founded two years ago with a couple of distinct ideas in mind.

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I am bullish on the future of journalism, and think the pessimists are not just a drag, but in their own way, naïve.

The first was that in this crowded media environment, journalists are not commodities. The best journalists have distinctive strengths, with a disproportionate ability to have impact and drive conversation. In a Web era, these journalists have in many cases built their own franchises. This is different from earlier generations, when the most important factor behind a reporter's influence was his or her institutional platform. It is an entrepreneurial age, not an institutional one. Politico seeks to take advantage of this trend by assembling a roster of journalists with a demonstrated ability to thrive on the Web, and then helping them build their franchises. This is an expensive model, but it has paid dividends for us in public profile, audience growth, and, yes, advertising dollars.

The second idea on which Politico is based is that today's niche publications have certain intrinsic advantages in their business models—advantages that are amplified by the Web. Legacy news organizations typically had business models that thrived on inefficiency. Perhaps only 1 percent of *The Washington Post* readership, for instance, is looking at any moment to buy a car. But car dealers paid handsomely to reach 100 percent of them.

Politico is different. We basically cover four related subjects: Congress, the White House, the Washington lobbying and influence industry, and national politics. No one is coming to our site for Washington Redskins news, or Fairfax County crime news. That means we are able to cover our areas of expertise much more intensively. And it means that advertisers know precisely—with a high degree of efficiency—who they are reaching on our site. If you want to reach sports fans, talk to ESPN.com. If you want to reach an educated and affluent demographic that cares intensely about national and civic affairs, talk to Politico.

What we have done at Politico has been relevant to the conversation about where journalism is going. But by no means do I believe that we have cracked the code on the awesome challenges facing our profession. Both of the time-travel flights I sketched above contain elements of my real-life perspective. I am bullish on the future of journalism, and think the pessimists are not just a drag, but in their own way, naïve. I also think that complacency is a curse, and that constant innovation is indeed the only remedy.

So there is no rest for the weary, and no time to worry much about anxiety dreams. I am wide awake now. **CJR**

# Get Off the Bus

*The future of pro-am journalism*

BY AMANDA MICHEL

Standing before a fawning crowd at a private fundraiser in San Francisco last April, Senator Barack Obama's usually finely calibrated rhetoric loosened up. He characterized the electoral mood among working-class voters in the key battleground of rural Pennsylvania, saying, "It's not surprising then they get bitter; they cling to guns or religion or antipathy for people who aren't like them." Mayhill Fowler, a Bay Area blogger who had

given money to the Obama campaign, was among the three hundred people present. She was taken aback by the senator's comment, and wrote about it on The Huffington Post on April 11. Her piece ignited a media firestorm whose flames rose right up to the walls of Obama headquarters.

None of this was supposed to happen. Fowler was not a professional journalist. The sixty-two-year-old woman had—in her own words—"worked a bit as a teacher, editor, and writer, but mostly raised two daughters." The fundraiser was closed to the press but Fowler—known to campaign staff—was admitted as a donor. Armed with a recorder and knowledge of the Obama operation, she also attended as a citizen journalist.

If none of this was supposed to happen in the world of professional journalism, it was precisely the type of story we aimed to produce at OffTheBus, where Fowler was one of our leading contributors. OffTheBus (OTB) was a citizen-

powered campaign news site co-sponsored by The Huffington Post and Jay Rosen's NewAssignment, at New York University's Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute. Inspired by Timothy Crouse's *The Boys on the Bus*, which chronicled a campaign's ability to manipulate the press, we instructed our citizen journalists to steer clear of the horse race and the top-down coverage that dominates the mainstream press. We didn't try to replicate what traditional journalists do well. Instead, we focused on what traditional journalists couldn't, or wouldn't, do: cover the grass roots, and let those roots guide our coverage. Digital technology had broken the monopoly on the production of journalism, and we exploited that reality by organizing thousands of "ordinary" (more often extraordinary) people to cover what was possibly the most important election of our lifetime.

We built our newsroom across a virtual no man's land—that gaping chasm between the decentralized and often personal political blogosphere, which can overheat when it encounters ineptitude or corruption, and the mainstream press, which focuses on scoop reporting and looks at politics mostly from the top down. We aimed the citizen journalists of OffTheBus between the two, and they delivered a range of information and perspective that is often ignored by, or inaccessible to, the press. And we did it in an organized and centralized fashion, and with respect for journalistic standards of reporting and judgment.

OffTheBus discovered a niche market. Our market was defined by our access to on-the-ground information that other news outlets lacked, and collaborative, crowd-powered methods of newsgathering that made some traditional journalists uncomfortable. Private fundraisers, official campaign conference calls, volunteer meetings, and rallies—where mainstream reporters found themselves stuck in pens—were our specialty. We wanted to tell stories inaccessible to the national press. This required replacing objectivity with an ethic of transparency—we would never have broken Bittergate if we had not.

Collectively, we could do what a single reporter or traditional news organization could not. We dispatched people to report on dozens of events happening simultaneously around the country. We distributed research tasks among hundreds of volunteers, instead of a handful of paid reporters working full-time for weeks. Ground-level access, networked intelligence, and distributed labor became our

editorial mainstays. More than twelve thousand people eventually signed up to participate in one way or another, including seventeen hundred writers. With such numbers, Mayhill Fowler's Bittergate story—or something like it—was almost inevitable.

It sounds impressive: twelve thousand people. But the challenge was not persuading them to sign up. It was figuring out what they were willing and able to do after that, and then cost-effectively coordinating their efforts so that they added up to real journalism. By Election Day, we had solved enough of that puzzle that I can now say to professional journalists: we found a viable pro-am model for advancing stories both around the globe and in your backyards, and you should take a serious look at it. Our experience with OffTheBus demonstrates that what Clay Shirky calls the "mass amateurization" of journalism can provide real breakthroughs—not only in the democratization of news and information but also in bolstering the role of the media as a pillar of democracy. What we did won't replace what traditional newsrooms do, but if taken seriously and used properly, this pro-am model has the potential to radically extend the reach and effectiveness of professional journalism. And it won't break the bank. More than five million people read OTB's coverage in October 2008, and our tab for sixteen months of nationwide collaborative journalism was just \$250,000.

Here's what we did and how we did it.

MAYHILL FOWLER HAD BEEN MANAGED AND EDITED FOR almost a year by the staff at OffTheBus before she broke Bittergate. Though we were working with several hundred writers, we could give reporters like Fowler personal attention because OTB did not operate like a traditional newsroom. Pro-am journalism demands a new kind of management.

I'm not a journalist by training and I directed the project using the online organizing tactics I learned on the campaigns of Howard Dean and John Kerry. Unlike traditional organizers, Web organizers communicate and organize using online tools. They operate asynchronously. An e-mail they send out at 5 p.m. may not get read until 9 p.m., or 1 a.m. Or maybe never. They must deal effectively with fast, exponential membership growth. They set aside a greater percentage of their time and budget for initiatives that capitalize on unforeseen circumstances. A good online organizer knows that most people join an organization after they take an action on its behalf, like donating \$5 to fight cancer.

OTB was the fourth organization I had launched, and I had become a working existentialist: you are what you do. Rather than write manifestos or abstract guidelines, I focused our membership on immediate goals and challenges. Our projects built a culture based on journalistic standards that drew heavily, but not exclusively, from so-called Old Media. We sent back pieces for rewrites and subjected our contributors to different degrees of editing. Deadlines and assignments weren't just practical necessities; they were our best marketing tools. OffTheBus experienced its highest growth when we launched high-profile projects, like our Superdelegate Investigation that engaged 227 contributors to find

out everything they could about this handpicked group of potential kingmakers.

Stories, not technology, were our best organizing tools. They gave information greater cohesion and structure than a wiki or a blog. They invoked a shared purpose. They also worked equally well from the ground up or from the top down. Let's try to figure out which way the evangelical vote will swing in Iowa, wrote Dan Treul, the editor of *The Saint*, the campus newspaper at Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to fellow OTBers in December 2008. And people signed up. Our best assignment e-mails drew participants by posing questions to members: How is the convention impacting Denver? Will Reagan Democrats vote Obama or McCain? Much as the Obama campaign successfully tapped into a yearning for engagement, OffTheBus spoke to thousands of citizens who wanted to help gather and report the news, not just consume it. There was a palpable joy among participants who transcended the role of spectator and created new narratives beyond those they were seeing in their daily newspapers day after day. This genuine interest in quality journalism is perhaps the most important lesson in all of this for the professional press.

But it wasn't just fun. Metrics were essential to make sure work got done. I tracked people's participation, and noted when they dropped out of a project. We knew which of our writers got published more frequently. The number of people who opened our e-mails and then took action told me our conversion rates. Our membership was approximately 60 percent Democrat. Women were the majority; their participation on reporting projects never fell below 50 percent. After Bittergate, retired journalists joined OTB in droves.

Each OffTheBus staff member—the professional component of our pro-am formula—also played a specific role. Arianna Huffington and Jay Rosen were our publishers. Marc Cooper, a veteran journalist and a member of the faculty at the USC Annenberg School for Communication, was our editorial adviser. From August 2007 until April 2008, Neil Nagraj coordinated writers and edited copy. Later, editor John Tomasic took his place. In September 2008, we hired Hanna Ingber Win to oversee our features.

As OTB grew, it required the staff to continually restructure and consciously blur that pro-am divide. We invited those who passed an editing test to become op-ed editors.

CITIZEN JOURNALISTS, USING PRIMARILY TWITTER, GAINED worldwide praise for providing the initial bursts of information during the terror attacks last year in Mumbai. But almost a year earlier, in December 2007, Bryan Bissell, an OffTheBus member and a substitute teacher, created a breakthrough moment for OTB and for pro-am reporting broadly.

Minutes after news broke on November 30, 2007, that several staff members in Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton's campaign office in Rochester, New Hampshire, had been taken hostage, I tapped our database to find our contributor nearest to the scene. It was Bissell. Two hours later, when school let out, he raced over to the headquarters. By then, Fox News had named Troy Alan Stanley as the hostage-taker. The

police had cordoned off downtown Rochester, and reporters were camped outside the campaign office. We found Stanley's home address and sent Bissell to his neighborhood.

When Bissell arrived at Stanley's building, there were no police and the super's wife insisted that Stanley was innocent. "Stanley walked into his apartment not two minutes ago," she told him. Bissell then talked to Stanley, who said he had only just learned of the hostage situation. Less than two minutes before we published our story, Fox News issued a correction. Bissell not only demonstrated how HuffPost could do much more than aggregate existing news reports, he also did what citizen journalists in Mumbai did not—advanced a story beyond the Web's organic happenings.

It was an important early milestone in helping us understand what we could do with OTB. Initially, we had two main strategies for producing our journalism: we recruited and mentored citizen journalists who could independently write and report, and took on stories using collaborative-reporting

to produce high-quality stories and, we think, to occasionally out-report the MSM. In the fall of 2007, for example, Obama's campaign promised to unleash thousands of supporters with a strong antiwar message into the streets for a weekend-long "Canvass for Change." *Was Obama's message a game-changer?* wondered the pundits and the press. We dispatched two dozen members to find out, going door to door with Obama's canvassers. Reporting from sixteen cities and towns, they all independently told us that people were more concerned with domestic issues than with the war. Drawing on this blanket of ground-level reporting for a piece titled, **REPORTING THE OBAMA CAMPAIGN COAST-TO-COAST**, Mayhill Fowler suggested that it was issues such as health care, not the war in Iraq (as the Obama campaign and the punditocracy assumed), that would decide the election. Only some months later did that conclusion finally seep into the conventional wisdom on display in the mainstream press.

An organized network can sketch a story into relief within days. In collaboration with WNYC's *Brian Lehrer Show* in November 2007, we asked listeners to help us figure out former President Bill Clinton's financial impact on Senator Clinton's campaign. Kerri Glover, a former Clinton administration staffer, dug up names from Clinton's '92 and '96 campaign fundraisers. Our network of researchers generated a list of guests who had overnighted in the Lincoln Bedroom during the '90s. Before long, we had a roadmap. No fewer than five people with accounting experience calculated the net contributions to Senator Clinton's campaign from Bill Clinton's former staffers and from his book-signing tours. "Usually an untrained intern would check figures like this," Marc Cooper quipped. "We've got dueling accountants." Such redundancy is a network fact-checking tool. Daniel Nichanian, a senior at Yale University, and I analyzed the final data and he wrote the story, **BILL CLINTON: HILLARY'S RAINMAKER**, which illustrated the benefits of running for office with a former president at your side.

We discovered that politically involved people make great sources, especially en masse. They almost always disclosed more information, because they knew more. It was the loyal Democrats, for instance, who told us that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was typically the first item removed from the party's platform during the DNC's grassroots platform meetings in July 2008. They told us who voted for what, and why. Even when reporting on politicians they supported, they believed strongly in a public airing of important information.

Despite the tremendous growth of our network—from three hundred in July 2007 to more than eight thousand by summer 2008—we still faced publishing challenges heading into June of last year. The problem wasn't getting content; hundreds of submissions came in daily. But the scope of our collaborative-reporting assignments frequently outstripped our writers' capacity to turn all those data into cogent stories. In the pro-am equation, it's easier for the amateur side to collect and analyze information than it is to hone the final narrative. Yet our growing ambition demanded bigger, more complex stories. So we introduced another collaborative strategy: generative features.

"Eyes and Ears," as we called this new feature, which we

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## The skill sets available to us, to gather and analyze information, matched or surpassed those in many newsrooms.

methodologies in which a network, not an individual reporter, breaks news. This is both revolutionary and not. Major metro dailies like *The New York Times* often publish stories that draw from reporting by a half dozen or so reporters and stringers around the country. OTB stories were like that approach on steroids, with twelve thousand reporters and stringers, albeit unpaid volunteers, to draw from.

The first strategy—recruiting and mentoring citizen journalists—was by far the most time-consuming, costly, and risky. We struggled for months to build a cadre of committed writers who could carry the publication. We invested most of our editorial resources in fact-checking, editing, reworking leads, and providing guidance. The ideal of a citizen journalist bequeathed to us by new-media evangelists both inspired and got in the way. Incoming writers had great expectations, like beating The Associated Press to a scoop. They raced to put out copy only to realize the story already sat on HuffPost's homepage. Ultimately, many more felt comfortable being impressionistic, profiling their and their friends' experiences around the campaign. They resisted hard leads. We risked becoming the Monet School of Journalism. This forced us to redouble our efforts to nudge and teach writers how to produce the sort of reliably reported coverage we desired. We had to create and sustain a strong reporting culture, and that meant slower growth to start, and lots of editing.

In the meantime, collaborative reporting made it possible

joked was OffTheBus's version of the *New Yorker*'s "Talk of the Town," asked readers to submit fifty- to one-hundred-word anecdotes. We published the best, and regularly culled through the growing pile of those we didn't publish for story ideas and tips. Everything went into a database that was sortable by zip code.

Wende Marshall, an assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Virginia, confessed in her "Eyes and Ears" submission that her "blood pressure had been higher than normal." Her doctor, she said, "recommended that we [African-American women] double our dose of hypertension meds until Obama wins." Minutes after Annie Shreffler, OTB's "Eyes and Ears" editor, pointed out Marshall's submission, I assigned the story to Diane Tucker, a former journalist living in Washington, D.C. Tucker's story, PRE-ELECTION ANXIETY SQUEEZES AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN, was one of the most popular on The Huffington Post in the last week of October 2008.

UNLIKE WIKIPEDIA, OFFTHEBUS WAS NOT AN OPEN PLATFORM. Anyone could sign up, but publishing accounts were administered by the staff and only content that met our editorial standards was published. Still, OffTheBus and Wikipedia operated from the same editorial principle: quantity can become quality, if you do it right.

Our network included doctors, lawyers, professors, students, data crunchers, and so on, and the skill sets available to us—when it came to gathering and analyzing information—could match or surpass those found in many newsrooms. Yet good pieces of journalism still happened one at a time. Most of our writers looked inward. They documented their hours working phone banks, or their experiences at rallies. We called this ground-level coverage—what a presidential campaign looks like to participants outside the media circus—and it allowed us to evolve from Monet journalism to pointillism. Several impressionistic pieces are just that—pieces. When many of them are published, sometimes a broader image emerges. We didn't master the pointillist method, but the glimpses we got were promising.

By the fall of 2008, OffTheBus readers could choose from a broad and motley assortment of stories and features. Dawn Teo, a graduate student in statistics, and Diane Tucker uncovered one of the keys to the Obama campaign's fundraising juggernaut: selling merchandise. Students contributed reports from battleground states. Our Grassroots Correspondents, a group of volunteers primarily in the Obama campaign, filed weekly journals detailing, among other things, gender dynamics and economic fallout along the campaign trail. Volunteers recorded the Obama and McCain campaign conference calls, and made the audio available to the public as part of our Listening Posts project. Ron Levitt, a retired journalist living in Miami, hammered out AP-style stories about Florida politics. Photos of various campaign headquarters around the country were embedded in a nationwide map, which Google then turned into one of its featured election maps.

In a review of media coverage of the campaign for the

*American Journalism Review*, Paul Farhi, a *Washington Post* reporter, described OffTheBus as "journalistically uneven." I agree. One reason why was simple: good writers are scarce and OTB wasn't a paying gig. Our editorial focus wasn't providing the Big Picture, as outlets like the *Post* and *The New York Times* attempt to do; it was correcting that picture with ground-level details that might be messier but are also closer to an election's beating heart.

OTB WRITERS LIKE BRYAN BISSELL, MAYHILL FOWLER, Daniel Nichanian, Diane Tucker, and Dawn Teo may be new to the media, but they have long been participants in America's greatest tradition—volunteerism and citizen engagement. Now that this tradition has begun to blossom in yet one more venue, the sphere of public information, journalism should take heed and pick up where campaigns and nonprofits have left off. The pro-am model is part of this equation. What OTB did was just a start, but we proved that it is viable and desirable. Implementation and refinement of our methods also will deepen relationships with viewers and readers—the public. A stronger rapport with the public won't solve journalism's crisis by itself, but it could be a central component of the solution.

The integration of strands of the pro-am strategy into the journalism mainstream will be bumpy. It will require, among other things, a shift in journalism's traditional ethical matrix. Transparency and disclosure, rather than neutrality—often tainted if not patently false—must become critical fourth estate virtues. The pros must commit to figuring out how to harness, cooperate with, and assimilate citizen journalists into the future of their craft. In other words, more professional journalists should take their offline skills—such as interviewing sources—online, and learn to build and manage networks of sources to produce accurate information.

For new media, the reverse is true. While they can quickly aggregate and grow the ranks of citizen journalists, they must take much more seriously the professional side of the equation—the reporting and editing and verification. It would be just as difficult for The Huffington Post to adopt pro-am strategies as it would be for *The New York Times*.

Across the country, news budgets and newsrooms are shrinking. Newspapers are going out of business. Meanwhile, the government is propping up Wall Street with a massive bailout that will cost the public billions, and planning to invest billions more in infrastructure, green jobs, health care reform, sustainable energy, etc. In all this, there are many opportunities for critical collaborative-reporting projects that will engage thousands of people who want to make themselves useful to the press. The Obama administration may have thirteen million e-mail addresses, but together the media—both old and new—have more. The timing for a new social contract between the press and the public could not be better. There will be no reason to mourn the loss of its audience if the press fully understands and exploits the new reality that its audience can now be its ally. **CJR**

AMANDA MICHEL directed OffTheBus. She lives in Manhattan.

# Suffering in Silence

*Ground zero's other victims*

BY ANTHONY DEPALMA

Even now, more than seven years later, images of that day remain frightfully raw, in large measure because a legion of photographers and journalists made the unimaginable events of September 11, 2001, all too real. Some happened to be in lower Manhattan when the first plane struck that morning. Some arrived as the first tower collapsed. Others called in favors so they could slip under police barricades or fly over the debris pile while the fires raged. All of

them considered themselves lucky to have been able to get so close to the biggest story of their lives.

But their luck also marked them. Being close enough to the tragedy to capture the horror put them close enough to breathe in the dust that exploded with hurricane force from the obliterated towers. Close enough to have the dust work its way into their bodies just as the images of that day worked their way into their minds and hearts.

Several scientific studies have linked the dust—as corrosive as drain cleaner—to a range of medical problems, some chronic and some life-threatening. The tsunami of dust engulfed everyone who was there that day. Some were left with disabilities that curtailed or ended their careers. Some carry physical and emotional scars that they rarely speak about.

Gary Fabiano, a freelance photographer, had been downtown shooting polling booths for what had started out as primary-election day in New York. He was heading back to

his agency's office when a call came in on his cell, and he turned right around. He got so close to the towers that when he looked up, he could not see the top of the building coming down at him. But he heard it. "It was like an avalanche of steel and concrete, the steel snapping, the concrete grinding," he says. "It went completely black, then dead silent."

Fabiano and a New York City firefighter tried to outrun the dust cloud. They took shelter in the loading dock of 7 World Trade Center, a building that hours later would also collapse. "There was so much soot and what the fireman told me was pure asbestos in the air we were breathing," he says. "If you took vacuum bags, filled them up with dust and emptied them down your throat, that's pretty much what it felt like."

Besides tons of ground-up concrete, the 9/11 dust clouds contained a toxic brew of compounds—including asbestos, lead, benzene, and mercury—that scientists continue to study. What we know so far is that exposure, even for a relatively short time, could burn breathing passages and cause permanent damage. The dust contaminated lungs and could lead to scarring diseases, like fibrosis and sarcoidosis. While the scientific link between dust and disease has not yet been proven with absolute certainty, the dust has been connected to underweight babies born in lower Manhattan, and to a sharp increase in asthma among adults. And the fallout hasn't been limited to physical ailments. A high percentage of individuals caught in the dust cloud developed post-traumatic stress.

Of course, ground-zero journalists are not alone in falling victim to the dust. Hundreds of uniformed responders—police and fire and emergency medical technicians—have left their jobs on permanent disability. Thousands of construction workers who cleared the site, most of the time without the protection of any kind of respirator mask, are suing the city because they got sick. And for thousands who lived, worked, or went to school in the shell-shocked neighborhoods of lower Manhattan, the dust infiltrated nearly every inch of their lives.

But what sets journalists apart from the others is that, by and large, they have not been treated like victims, either because of their own denials or because the system does not consider them responders, even though they—like cops and firefighters—rushed toward the doomed buildings as everyone else ran away from them. Some have had to fight with their employers for help, arguing with human-resources officers and compensation lawyers who refused to link



**Torn open** Photojournalist Bolivar Arellano in lower Manhattan on 9/11

illness to dust. Some have simply not told their supervisors they were hurt, fearing that acknowledging an ailment or asking for time off would break a newsroom ethos. "I was astounded to learn that the stigma and shame attached to acknowledging any emotional stress was even greater for journalists than it was for policemen, firefighters, and other emergency responders," says Elana Newman, a psychologist and director of research for the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, which addresses the coverage of tragedies and the impact that such coverage has on journalists. Newman and Dart ran a trauma center for ground-zero journalists in 2002. She says that she spent time talking with a broad range of people who survived the disaster, but found that journalists were the least willing to talk about their feelings. Getting them to come to the formal group sessions she organized proved difficult, so she eventually had to conduct meetings in bars and an East Village photography gallery. "Journalists do see themselves as different," she says.

Take Bolivar Arellano, a senior photographer for the *New York Post* who rushed to the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11, arriving in time to photograph people falling a thousand feet to their deaths. When the first tower collapsed, Arellano was directly beneath it and shot pictures of it coming down on top of him. He escaped, but was back by the time the second tower collapsed. This time

he was blown off his feet and knocked unconscious. When he came to, his right leg was torn open at the knee. "When I got up I must have had ten pounds of dust on my back," Arellano says, during a recent interview on the east side of Manhattan, near where he lives. "I thought, 'I survived the collapse but now I'm going to die by the dust and ash.'"

Arellano recovered and went back to work. But he wasn't the same. He developed a dry cough that never really went away. He lost his balance, and more. "I also started having emotional problems but I was afraid to say anything to the editors," he says, and that included his son, Juan, the *Post's* photo editor. In his native Ecuador, Arellano had covered a massacre of students, and he photographed victims in El Salvador during the war there. But 9/11 had scarred his heart as well as his leg. "I couldn't tell anyone that I cried day and night thinking of those people jumping," he says. "They would think that I was an emotionally unstable person."

Arellano eventually received a monetary settlement from the federal government's September 11 Victim Compensation Fund for the injury to his leg. His knee healed, but his breathing problems and emotional stress have never gone away. Four years ago, he retired from journalism. "Last week I was coughing like a dog—that same dry cough as always," Arellano says. "I live with the fear that I'm going to choke and not be able to breathe." He is sixty-four.

Freelancers have been even more reluctant than staffers like Arellano to admit their troubles to editors and colleagues, certain that turning down an assignment that they are no longer physically capable of doing, or asking for less-stressful assignments, would hurt their careers. "I will never tell them I am sick—never—for the simple reason that I am disposable," says Philippe Gassot, a fifty-two-year-old freelancer who in 2001 was a correspondent for French TV based in Washington, D.C. On the morning of September 11, he sped up I-95, arriving at ground zero by late afternoon when the air was still opaque with dust and smoke. For the next month, he was at ground zero every day, filming pieces and transmitting them to France.

Gassot flew back to France for Christmas that year, and colleagues there who had seen the huge dust clouds on TV urged him to see a doctor. During the examination, the doctor found that his lung capacity had dropped by 10 percent. Three years later he took a stress test. "The doctor asked me when I had had a heart attack," Gassot says. He thought the doctor was mistaken. "I was always in good health before; I never had any problems, never saw a doctor. Suddenly, I had all kinds of problems, and they put a stent in my vein."

Gassot did stories on the ground-zero workers who signed up for screening and monitoring at the Mount Sinai Medical Center's World Trade Center programs, which are looking after more than 20,000 people who inhaled trade-center dust. But he never enrolled himself because he didn't want to take a chance of someone finding out about his condition.

A few years ago, New York State changed its workers' compensation system to help workers who had been injured at ground zero. Typically, a claim must be filed within two years of a work-related injury. But illnesses caused by exposure to contaminants, such as those found in the trade-center dust,

may not develop until years later. The legislature enacted special provisions to give people who might not be sick now until 2010 to register for the right to file claims far into the future. Everyone who worked on the rescue and recovery operations at ground zero in 2001 and 2002 was covered by the extended deadline. But not journalists.

That bothered David Handschuh, a forty-nine-year-old New York *Daily News* photographer who was caught in the debris from the collapsing south tower. His right leg was shattered, and he developed post-traumatic stress that prevents him from shooting hard news even now. He went to the state workers' compensation board and asked why journalists and photographers were not covered. "They said it was because the legislation does not specifically include members of the media," Handschuh says.

Joseph Cavalcante, a spokesman for the workers' compensation board, says that's true, but that journalists can file the registration form (called a WTC-12) anyway. This

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**Newman talked to a broad range of 9/11 survivors, and journalists were the least willing to discuss their feelings.**

way, he says, if the law changes they will be covered. Handschuh acknowledges that getting the legislature to revisit the law and include journalists is a long shot, but he is putting together a case that may end up helping. He has posted a four-page questionnaire on the Web site of the New York Press Photographers Association, asking for specifics about who worked at ground zero, and how doing so has affected them. He has amassed the most comprehensive set of data about photographers and journalists who were injured on 9/11.

So far, 190 media workers have responded. Fifty-seven percent reported having breathing problems after working at ground zero. Nearly 40 percent said they had developed asthma, and half of those who reported having breathing problems said they were still struggling to breathe today. One in three journalists said that the air at ground zero had caused a chronic cough (only 13 percent said they were active smokers and 58 percent said they had never smoked). Nearly 60 percent said they had developed acid reflux, or similar maladies, after 9/11, and most said they still have it. The journalists' problems were not limited to physical ailments. Nearly one in five said they had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, and one in four was suffering from depression.

**FOR SOME, THERE WAS NO DISTANCE AT ALL BETWEEN THE** biggest story of their careers and their own lives. On 9/11, Catherine Leuthold, freelance photographer, took the subway

into Manhattan and got there in time to photograph both towers collapsing. At one point, she ducked into an abandoned ambulance, grabbed some gauze and wrapped it around her nose and mouth. "I remember thinking it was really bad to breathe this stuff in."

Within days, she started having trouble breathing. A runner, she couldn't even walk briskly for more than a few blocks. Early in 2002, when she was in Hebron to cover the second Intifada, she and a fellow photographer had to run from what sounded like gunfire. She struggled to breathe, and collapsed. Vertigo kept her bedridden for two and a half days. Back in New York months later, she rushed to cover an explosion in Chelsea but ran out of breath so quickly that she knew something had to be wrong. That was followed by another Middle East trip, and the funeral of a Palestinian boy who had been shot by Israeli soldiers. "I was sobbing, and I was taking pictures at the same time, and realizing that I didn't know if I could continue," Leuthold says.

Her breathing problems got worse, the vertigo continued, and Leuthold realized that she had been hurt on 9/11 in ways that she was still figuring out. She felt she needed a drastic change, so in 2006 she left New York for a two-hundred-year-old farmhouse on the Maine coast. She is a landscaper there now, designing gardens and planting bulbs. She teaches photography at a local Montessori school and she still shoots, though nothing resembling hard news.

For many who responded to Handschuh's survey, merely admitting a dust-related ailment raised the fear that it could derail their careers. Thirty percent said that their health problems had affected their careers, and about the same percentage felt that their emotional problems were interfering with their work. And here's the key to understanding ground zero's impact on journalists: nearly half of those who responded (45 percent) said they had been tempted to turn down an assignment that might trigger unwanted emotions. Yet only 25 percent said they had actually refused to take the assignment.

Like most 9/11 health surveys, this one suffers from its reliance on self-reported data. The exception is the New York City fire department, where each firefighter undergoes a yearly physical. That makes it possible to compare pre-9/11 and post-9/11 conditions. The results seem to support some of Handschuh's findings. Fire-department doctors have found, for instance, that many firefighters lost in one year the amount of lung capacity that they might have been expected to lose over the course of a dozen years.

Photographer Keith Silverman is a freelance cameraman with his own video company who worked regularly with *20/20* and other ABC network programs. On September 11, he was preparing to shoot the Fashion Week show at Bryant Park; when the first jet smashed into the north tower, a producer sent him to the trade center. Silverman spent that night and most of the following week videoing firefighters pulling bodies from the trade-center rubble. In all, he worked in the smoke and dust for three months without protective gear. Silverman, who is six-feet tall and weighs 260 pounds, says that it wasn't until 2004 that he first started noticing strange skin rashes on his arms and back. At that time, he was going through a divorce and had lost his health insurance.

A friend who is a nurse urged him to see a doctor about the mysterious lumps on his neck and chest. He did, and the tests came back positive for stage 2 Hodgkin's Lymphoma. He was forty-seven at the time. A subsequent CAT scan revealed that he also had pulmonary fibrosis.

Silverman says he didn't expect help from ABC because he was a freelancer, and he was right. It was too late for him to file for workers' compensation in New York. His only option was Social Security disability, but the legal process has been long and grueling. He's been turned down twice, and is appealing his case to a judge. He's also joined the thousands of responders who are suing the city of New York for negligence in the aftermath of 9/11.

Silverman could have gotten help from Mount Sinai's monitoring program, but after he signed up for it, he moved to Atlantic City and never went. At least 113 people who describe themselves as journalists, photographers, or camera operators are among the people enrolled in Mount Sinai's various 9/11 programs. Dr. Philip J. Landrigan, who oversees the programs, says the journalists are "showing pretty much the same problems at roughly the same proportions as anyone else who was down there." Those problems include asthma, sinusitis, interstitial lung diseases, acid reflux, and post-traumatic stress. One of the important findings from Mount Sinai and other studies is that many people who were exposed to the dust in the first few days developed the same complex set of related illnesses. My friend Keith Meyers is one of them. We worked together for more than two decades at *The New York Times*. He is an avid boater who has covered many stories in and around New York's harbor. After 9/11, he used his contacts to talk his way aboard a Coast Guard helicopter that flew over ground zero. He was in the air, with his camera out the open door, as the chopper hovered over the burning debris pile in the days immediately after the collapse. The smoke and gasses from the raging fires mixed with the dust and ash from the collapsed towers in ways that scientists believe made breathing that air at that time particularly hazardous. Meyers wore no protective gear, but he came back with prize-winning photographs.

By 2006, Meyers was barely able to work. He had come down with the whole range of trade-center symptoms—the persistent dry cough, recurring asthma, gastrointestinal reflux disease, and emotional distress. Although he had photographed many grisly events in his career, Meyers was unnerved by the images from 9/11 and the lingering physical impact the dust had on him. He was put on restricted duty, but in time, as his physical problems mounted, even that proved too stressful.

His editors and immediate newsroom supervisors were sympathetic and did what they could to help. But when he put in for workers' comp, he found himself fighting a system set up to handle broken arms, not breathing problems that take years to develop. As I was writing story after story about the environmental and health impact of ground zero, I watched Meyers get sicker and sicker. Because of the articles I was writing, he opened up to me about the hoops he had to jump through as he dealt with corporate medical officers and the Times Company's insurer, who suggested that his asthma was a preexisting condition even though Meyers

had regularly passed the Federal Aviation Administration's rigorous Class 1 Flight Physical, which allowed him to fly with and photograph the crew of the space shuttle *Challenger* while they were in training.

Officials at the *Times* declined to discuss individual personnel issues. But William Schmidt, a deputy managing editor who worked to get help for Meyers, says that dealing with his post-9/11 issues has raised important new considerations for the newsroom. "Whenever we send people into harm's way, we stand behind them and we always will," Schmidt says. "But the kinds of problems and risks that were presented at the WTC site were something new to us and were not as easily understood or assessed."

After years of emotionally draining struggle, Meyers was put on indefinite medical leave. He said he is satisfied with the way the *Times* ultimately resolved his case, and he finally won his workers' compensation case. But winning is a poor way of describing what's happened to him since 9/11. He can no longer shoot photographs or go out on his beloved boat. He declined several requests to discuss his problems on the record, saying it was too painful. But in a brief interview in March 2008 with the *Photo District News*, Meyers, who is now sixty, revealed the sad truth about his situation. "Not working is harder than being sick," he said.

Bruce Shapiro, the executive director of the Dart Center, called 9/11 "a wake-up call for a lot of news organizations." But with economic gloom hanging over the news industry now, adding the costs of trauma training isn't a priority.

I've spent a lot of time over the last four years interviewing survivors of 9/11, many sick and most full of fear. They told me how the worst thing of all has been dealing with the unending doubt. They feel betrayed whenever insurers or the compensation system or their own bosses question how dust could make anyone sick. Science, medicine, and the courts are searching for certainty before making a definitive link between the dust and disease. But I've learned that absolute certainty can be an elusive goal, and that it has different meanings in the laboratory, in the courtroom, and perhaps in the unspoken ethos of the newsroom.

New York State's decision to allow uniformed responders to register for future claims can be seen as a tacit acknowledgement of the bleak future that possibly awaits those who inhaled the dust. Excluding journalists and photographers from those provisions challenges concepts of fairness and justice. For ground-zero journalists it's painful, but no surprise. "No one wants to say that yes, this existed, because that opens up the door for anyone who was down there to ask for help," says Gary Fabiano, the freelance photographer who took refuge at the loading dock on 9/11. He says he feels helpless to change things for himself, or for others. And he knows that no matter what happened before, the next time there's a catastrophe and the air is poisoned, he'll be expected to rush in, no questions asked.

And he says he probably will. **CJR**

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ANTHONY DEPALMA, a reporter and foreign correspondent for *The New York Times* for more than twenty years, is now writer-in-residence at Seton Hall University. He is writing a book about the aftermath of 9/11.





# Ideas + Reviews

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ESSAY

## In the Foothills of Change

Foreign coverage seems doomed, but it's only just begun

BY JOHN MAXWELL HAMILTON

Some months ago, while exploring files in the nearly empty, ink-blackened basement of the old *New York Times* building on West Forty-third Street in Manhattan, I came across a 1968 memorandum from Seymour Topping. The longtime foreign correspondent had just been put in charge of foreign news, and his memo outlined the changes he planned.

The emphasis on getting spot news first, Topping argued, was outmoded. This he chalked up to the "special challenge" of electronic journalism, with around-the-clock radio news and what he perceived as the glimmerings of real-time television coverage. "Foreign news dispatches on news agency printers," he noted, are "shown on TV screens at about the same time those dispatches come into the wireroom."

He also insisted that it no longer made sense for the *Times* to view itself exclusively as the paper of record, simply reproducing arcane diplomatic documents. "For much of the detail of the daily developments, which we formerly reported," Topping wrote, "the historian will go in the future to the computer-regulated data bank rather than specifically to *The New York Times*." This observation—made when computers were large, clunky machines owned by institutions, not individuals—was so far ahead of its time that someone had scribbled "?" in the margin of the file copy.

The *Times* under Topping became, as he directed, "less preoccupied with the daily official rhetoric of the capitals.... Our report should reflect more fully the social, cultural, intellectual, scientific and technological revolutions, which, more than the political, are transforming the world society." Soon Topping's title was changed from the traditional "foreign news editor" to the more commanding "foreign editor," which it remains to the present day. His competence and steady hand later elevated him to managing editor. But the significance of that moment in the paper's history transcends Topping's insights.

Owners, editors, and correspondents have constantly tinkered with notions of what foreign news should be, how it should be covered, and by whom. The *Chicago Daily News* created the first great newspaper foreign service, a model for systematic expert reporting by American correspondents. Owner-editor Victor Lawson, one of the greatest newspaper geniuses of all time, began the service on the heels of the Spanish-American War as "largely an experiment."

Understanding the evolution of this experiment, marked by trial and error, matters especially today. The edifice of foreign newsgathering appears to be disintegrating, rather like a massive building demolished by internal detonation—in

this case, the exploding economic model for mass media. Respected foreign services run by *The Baltimore Sun*, *Newsday*, *The Boston Globe*, and *The Philadelphia Inquirer* have been obliterated. By late last year, none of the three broadcast networks stationed full-time correspondents in Iraq, a war zone with 130,000 American troops. Among weekly newsmagazines, the most telling trajectory is that of *U.S. News & World Report*. Over the years, the "W" in *World* on the masthead became progressively smaller. By November 2008, when the magazine announced that it would cease publishing a weekly ink-on-paper edition, it had eliminated all permanent foreign correspondents.

Still, looking at these changes against the backdrop of history tells us that all is not lost. Modern foreign correspondence is younger than professional baseball and psychoanalysis. We are merely in the foothills of change.

THE HISTORY OF FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE falls into eras. Beginning in colonial times, printers of newspapers relied quite literally on foreign correspondence—that is, unpaid letter writers with news to share. They were equally dependent on stealing stories from foreign journals, which they rushed to collect from arriving ships. This led to a historical curiosity: although there were no editors, let alone reporters, newspapers

Mexican War with a novel sense of urgency; Henry Stanley, who in the era's relentless effort to "make" news found Dr. David Livingstone in East Africa for the *New York Herald*; and George Smalley, who, after setting up a permanent London bureau for the *New York Tribune*, became famous for organizing coverage of major events by teams of reporters.

Victor Lawson's foreign service at the *Chicago Daily News*, which was eventually syndicated to more than a hundred newspapers, set the stage for the next era. When a Pulitzer Prize was established for foreign correspondence in 1929, Paul Scott Mowrer of the *Daily News* won it, with reports that read like analytical diplomatic cables. By this time, foreign correspondence had entered a golden age. Large numbers of knowledgeable journalists covered the world for newspapers, magazines, and the upstart medium of radio. They remained largely independent of the home office and, thanks to international goodwill toward Americans, were well received wherever they roamed. The news—two world wars, Communist revolutions, the emergence of global interdependence—was of towering significance. The celebrity and expertise of correspondents were never greater.

The transition from one period to the next never took place with one door slamming shut and another opening wide. Each was gradual, carrying forward vestiges of the past. And so it was with the emergence of the corporate correspondent, whose employer often owned many media outlets—not to mention other, nonjournalistic businesses—and answered to Wall Street. Satellite telephones and the Internet eventually put these correspondents in closer touch with their editors back home. It also made them less colorful and less independent, at a time when they were also perceived, like journalists generally, as less credible.

Which brings us to the present, an era that is only beginning to take shape but has a clear, defining feature: many types of foreign correspondents operating at once. Seasoned reporters representing major news outlets still exist, of course. But many new species of foreign news-gathering and distribution are appearing, most of them carrying some DNA of the

past. We might call this era a confederacy of correspondents.

Coverage at *The New York Times* remains formidable. The McClatchy Company, which purchased most of Knight Ridder in June 2006, kept Knight Ridder's foreign correspondents attached to its Washington bureau—even as McClatchy's own stock price dropped in the wake of the purchase. After Rupert Murdoch acquired *The Wall Street Journal*, the number of front-page stories on foreign topics jumped; pages of foreign news were added inside. The Associated Press recently increased the number of bureaus abroad, which now total 102 in ninety-seven countries. Even the celebrity-focused *Vanity Fair*, recognizing that foreign news confers respectability, recently hired a foreign correspondent to help it get "meat."

But again, the traditional American foreign correspondent no longer strides the stage alone. Here are some of the additional players:

*Foreign foreign correspondents*, meaning those foreign nationals who work for American news organizations. While this type is not entirely new, it is much more common today. A survey I conducted with my colleague Denis Wu in 2000 found that 69 percent of foreign correspondents for American news organizations were not Americans. Some of these reporters start out as fixers, who help reporters and can move around more freely in dangerous places. The Baghdad bureau chief for McClatchy referred to them as "journalists in their own right" and "the backbone of our coverage."

*Local foreign correspondents*, who cover the world from their hometowns. This seeming contradiction in terms has come about because of burgeoning global interdependence. A 2004 survey by the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation found that two-thirds of local broadcasters said they integrated world and local news into their shows. "We're in a new era now, in which the ambiguity in what is international and what is not international is very great," said Don Oberdorfer, a veteran *Washington Post* foreign correspondent, at a recent journalism conference.

*Parachute foreign correspondents*, who are sent on short-term assignments

## Modern foreign coverage is younger than pro baseball.

carried a greater percentage of foreign news than at any time since. It was not unusual for foreign topics to take up the entire front page of Benjamin Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*.

In the second period, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, special correspondents emerged. There was George Wilkins Kendall of the *New Orleans Picayune*, who covered the 1846

abroad. The term is often used pejoratively to describe the phenomenon of permanent reporters being replaced by less expensive, less experienced interlopers. Yet it also describes a more positive development. Local media that could never afford full-time correspondents now send reporters on ad-hoc assignments abroad. Major news media use the technique to augment coverage—the *Chicago Tribune*, for instance, sent a music critic to Latin America, and an expert on religion to help a permanent correspondent cover the election of a new pope.

Premium foreign correspondents, who work for services that charge fees for specialized, in-depth reporting. The antecedent is Reuters, which started out in the mid-nineteenth century as a news service for financiers. Modern versions include Bloomberg News and Dow Jones Newswires, as well as Reuters' own "gated" premium service.

In-house foreign correspondents, who gather timely, accurate industry news exclusively for their corporate employers. These reporters operate in a gray zone between journalism, marketing, and corporate communications. At British Petroleum, for example, editors produce the so-called *BP News*, a daily summary of BP-related stories from around the world. Federal Express has a similar video operation called FedEx-TV.

Citizen foreign correspondents, whose work is facilitated by new technology. Just as amateur, casual correspondents wrote letters for Benjamin Franklin's *Gazette*, these on-the-scene witnesses kept Twitter humming—to the tune of one message per second with the word "Mumbai"—when terrorists struck that Indian city late last year. Peter Maass, a contributor to *The New York Times Magazine*, said this about Salam Pax, the young Iraqi architect who posted dispatches on his Web site during the U.S. invasion: "Better than the army of foreign correspondents in the country."

Foreign local correspondents, such as an Indian journalist reporting in India for a New Delhi newspaper whose stories are read or watched via the Internet or satellite from Indianapolis. Indian emigrants are an obvious audience for these reports; but for those who cannot speak Hindi, specialized software is available to translate.

None of these new forms is perfect. Editors who hire foreign nationals—often because they're cheaper—feel less obliged to use their copy. Local foreign correspondents give their audiences a better sense of their ties to the world, but often lack deep understanding of global trends. And for every blogger with the insight of Salam Pax, hundreds have the credentials of Joe Wurzelbacher, a.k.a. Joe the Plumber, who

The continual experimentation needed to make the most of these new forms, as well as the old ones, will require a shift in the way we think about foreign coverage. Start with bureaus. The idea of placing correspondents in one location, where they develop expertise, has advantages. But there was never enough money to station a correspondent in every place where there was news.

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## Many new species of foreign news-gathering and distribution are appearing, most of them carrying some DNA of the past. We might call this era a confederacy of correspondents.

was sent to cover the recent conflict in Gaza by the conservative Web-based Pajamas Media.

FOR MANY CRITICS, THIS CONFEDERACY marks a sharp break with the time when the foreign correspondent was king. That bygone day is perhaps best captured in a romantic entry from the *Chicago Tribune*'s 1928 encyclopedia for readers: "If to this business of getting out a great daily newspaper there still clings any of the aura of romance which once surrounded all newspapers and all newspapermen, it is the foreign correspondents who get the greater share of it."

In fact, American foreign reporting has been no more perfect throughout its relatively short history than it has been static. Correspondents failed to anticipate World War I, and weren't quick to grasp what was going wrong in Vietnam. Colonel Robert McCormick, who oversaw the *Tribune* in 1928, made a roving correspondent out of a reporter who spoke nothing but English. "I don't want my fine young American boys ruined by these damn foreigners," McCormick explained. And when Victor Lawson began the *Chicago Daily News* experiment in foreign newsgathering, one of his first ideas was a column from London called "Queer Sprigs of Gentility."

Even in earlier eras, correspondents typically traveled quite a bit from their home base. Today's correspondents are even more mobile, and can quickly reach a breaking story almost anywhere. The ease of travel has made it desirable to think of correspondents as issue experts as much as place experts. After September 11, 2001, for example, the *Washington Post*'s Berlin reporter ranged widely as a terrorism correspondent; its two London correspondents reported on the transnational issues of migration, religion, and global digitalization. (This, too, was foreseen by Seymour Topping: "[S]taffers who have specialized knowledge and experience will be moved with increasing frequency across bureau lines.")

The trick now is to set up support networks for peripatetic correspondents. Broadcasters have begun placing reporters, camera staff, fixers, and producers at strategic locations around the world. ABC took this further in 2008 by opening one-person bureaus in seven cities, including New Delhi, Jakarta, Dubai, and Nairobi. Most of the work of these bureaus is done for the network's Web site, but they provide a newsgathering foundation when a big story breaks.

A second thing that needs rethinking is the for-profit model. This worked well enough when all news came in a few

mass-media packages, such as a paper or nightly broadcast, which was underwritten by advertisers who wanted to reach as many people as possible. Readers and viewers who didn't want foreign news got some anyway, along with the stuff they did want. But with the unbundling of news, the audience and the advertisers have migrated to whichever niches suit them best. Needless to say, this has imperiled all traditional news delivery. Yet foreign news is especially

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## Tax breaks could offset the cost of foreign correspondents.

ill-served, because it is the most expensive to produce and has the smallest audience. To subsidize it, we must devise new strategies.

One approach is exemplified by *The Christian Science Monitor*, which was supported mostly by its mother church throughout the last century and fielded an excellent foreign service. This non-profit model, once considered an anomaly, now manifests itself in various ways. The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, funded by members of the Pulitzer family as well as others, supports overseas travel by freelance and staff reporters who want to cover overlooked stories. The Ford Foundation underwrites environmental reporting abroad, and the German Marshall Fund has performed a similar service for NPR's European coverage. In addition, NPR expanded its foreign bureaus after a \$235 million bequest by Joan Kroc in 2003.

There is scope, too, for government help. Uncle Sam already supports the news with reduced postal rates and exemptions from regulations on unfair trade practices that allow troubled newspapers to share facilities. One approach for foreign news would be to create tax breaks to offset the expense of correspondents or bureaus, similar

to tax incentives for locating factories in underserved urban areas. Another would be tax credits—say, \$2,500 a year—to encourage individuals to purchase premium-service news. If government can support schools, why not news, which is essential to voter education?

Finally, anyone who looks carefully will see that some of the most promising experimentation involves a fusion of the new and old. Many of the most heavily trafficked (not to mention most-trusted) Web sites belong to traditional outlets like *The New York Times*. In a joint venture with Microsoft, the AP has created "an ad-supported video network," delivering its own streaming content via a Microsoft online player. Salam Pax, the Iraqi blogger, became a columnist for the ink-on-paper edition of the *Guardian* in London, even as he produced an old-fashioned book, *The Clandestine Diary of an Ordinary Iraqi*. Bloomberg News now syndicates its reports to newspapers, magazines, and radio stations, and publishes a magazine. Like Reuters a century and a half ago, it has begun to push beyond its initial customer base in the world of finance.

Another experiment that launched this year is GlobalPost, which makes full use of the confederacy of correspondents. The Boston-based enterprise delivers foreign articles, photographs, video, and audio over the Web by drawing on the services of contract correspondents around the world. Some of these "super stringers" are Americans, some are not. The brainchild of cable-television entrepreneur Philip S. Balboni and Charles M. Sennott, a former *Boston Globe* foreign correspondent, GlobalPost expects to generate income from three sources: advertising on its Web site, a specialized premium service to individuals willing to pay \$199 a year, and syndication to traditional news media. The editorial focus is on news that helps Americans "measure the impact of international events on their lives in an increasingly interconnected world."

The current round of experimentation has the potential to restore gloried aspects of the past. If consumers become accustomed to paying for foreign news, and if foundations embrace their responsibility to subsidize it, the quality of reporting may well go beyond what

was possible when we relied on advertisers—whose interest in the journalism is more limited—to pay for newsgathering. And these heightened expectations will attract more reporters like Paul Scott Mowrer, who wrote in a 1920 memorandum, "It is better to give a first-class service to those who can appreciate it than to aim to please all, and succeed in pleasing none."

Seasoned correspondents working for brand-name media will become better at sifting through the work of amateur correspondents, many of whom enjoy a level of freedom not seen since the golden years between the world wars. In those days, before editors could call at any moment of the day or night, correspondents explored parts of the world not well understood by Americans—or even, sometimes, by policymakers. Done well, this kind of reporting promises to bring news that might otherwise never surface. Even *The New York Times*, after all, can field only so many correspondents.

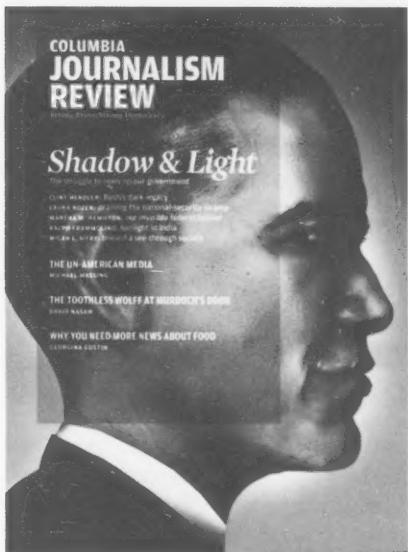
As we recalibrate how we think about foreign correspondence, we may find that we do better than ever, even when it comes to the raw numbers. The past has been fraught with constant lamentation (except in wartime) about the decline in the number of correspondents. But the total decline in the last decade is less than the number of correspondents put in the field by Bloomberg News alone, which has 1,284 journalists and editors outside the United States in about 105 bureaus.

In 1894, Charles A. Dana, the editor of the *New York Sun*, who early in his career was a pioneering correspondent on Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*, commented on the "comparatively new" profession of journalism. "The most essential part of this great mechanism," said Dana, "is not the mechanism itself; it is the intelligence, the brains, and the sense of truth and honor that reside in the men who conduct it and make it a vehicle of usefulness or, it may be, of mischief." This, at least, remains unchanged. **CJR**

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JOHN MAXWELL HAMILTON is dean of the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University. His latest book, *Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting*, will be published in September.

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## Buyer Beware

*A history of redlining and racism in Chicago*

BY HELENE STAPINSKI

EVERY NOW AND THEN, THE ZEITGEIST smiles down upon a writer and makes the subject she's been toiling over for a decade a hot topic at the time of publication. Such is the case with Beryl Satter's *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black America*. Through the lens of history, Satter sheds crucial light on both the current sub-prime-mortgage crisis and the importance of community organizing in Chicago. If anyone still questions the significance of such organizing in the inner city, she should read *Family Properties* for a lesson in just how hard a job it is.

The narrative—and the author's inspiration—begins at home. "If there's no limit to how much a man can make, and it doesn't matter how he makes it, God help us," Satter's grandfather, Isaac, used to say. But it was her father, Mark Satter, who put this philosophy into action by representing disenfranchised African Americans in Chicago.

The son of a Russian-Jewish immigrant, Mark Satter was born in 1916 and raised in the Lawndale section of Chicago. His father lost his small business during the Great Depression and struggled the rest of his life to support his large family. This, the author suggests, explains Mark's desire to succeed. She traces his compassion for the underdog to a childhood injury.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Mark Satter would make a name for himself as the "Clarence Darrow of the Bankrupt"—not only by representing African Americans in court, but by speaking out publicly against racial discrimination. The causes he championed involved such economic scams as wage garnishing and the credit racket, which formed a kind of vicious circle. First, crooked merchants would sell items on credit at inflated prices and with stratospheric interest rates. When customers failed to make a payment, their wages were garnished. Under Illinois law, creditors could take more than a quarter of a person's salary. In some cases, employers would fire employees rather than deal with the accounting headaches—which often led straight to "living on the dole."

Mark Satter's main cause, however, was the redlining and contract sales perpetrated by bankers and real-estate agents. While white Chicagoans had little difficulty obtaining mortgage loans in the neighborhoods of their choice, black residents were confined to ghettos and denied mortgages. Their neighborhoods were

marked on maps in red ink by appraisers—hence the term "redlining." Unable to secure federally insured mortgages, those African Americans who wished to purchase their own homes were forced to buy from unscrupulous contract sellers. The properties, sold at markups of 70 percent or more, had to be purchased in installments. If a single payment was missed, the family was evicted; the house was marked up again and resold to another unsuspecting black family. Contract sellers made a fortune, while scores of families wound up homeless. Their immoral behavior, and the government's support of it through the Federal Housing Administration, would spawn slums, large-scale poverty, blight, and eventually, riots. So argued Mark Satter, in and out of the courtroom.

The author follows several of her father's legal cases in detail, bringing to life not only the poor families involved, but also the predatory contract sellers, whose greed she seeks to explain without ever rationalizing it. She also acknowledges what were often partial or pyrrhic victories. Though Mark Satter was successful in settling some of his cases, the ones he brought to trial were almost all defeated by what he saw as a corrupt, racist judicial system. Time and time again, just as reform seemed to be around the corner, Satter and his clients were dealt another crushing defeat.

Battered down by those defeats, nearly bankrupted by his charitable work, Satter was unable to keep up his Lawndale properties—which, ironically, turned into slums. He was also alienated from his fellow lawyers, and died a broken man at the age of forty-nine.

But for Beryl Satter, the story was just beginning. A month after her father's death in 1965, a full-scale riot broke out in Lawndale. And the following month, Martin Luther King Jr. announced that his Southern Christian Leadership Conference would make Chicago the focus of its "Northern campaign." King chose an apartment in a slum building in the city's worst neighborhood—Lawndale—to spotlight the housing conditions there. Here were the broken-down structures with smashed windows that slumlords failed to fix, the rats patrolling the hallways, with what King described as "mounds of rubble instead of yards."

**Family Properties:  
Race, Real Estate, and the  
Exploitation of Black America**

By Beryl Satter  
Metropolitan Books  
512 pages, \$30

In painstaking detail, Satter traces King's fight with the powers-that-be in Chicago, namely Mayor Richard Daley and his Democratic machine. The issue was still open occupancy—the right of black families to live anywhere in the city. What King found was that Chicago's segregation was nearly absolute and the battle against it much harder than his SCCLC had anticipated. Some even spoke about "going back to the relative tranquility of being a civil-rights worker in Alabama."

Satter follows King and his organizers on their historic march through Cicero, a white Chicago suburb completely off limits to blacks. Earlier that year, in May 1966, a black teenager applying for a job in Cicero was killed by four white teens, who beat him so violently that his eyes were knocked out of his skull. Not surprisingly, Daley and his machine tried to dissuade King from marching there, calling it a suicide mission. King replied: "We're not only going to walk in Cicero, we're going to work and live there, too."

The march went forward as planned, on Labor Day weekend. Braving a hail of rocks and bottles, King and his marchers worked their way through the neighborhood, protected by two thousand National Guardsmen and a thousand police officers. It was a victory, but arguably a partial one, and King pulled out of Chicago that fall.

Yet King's fight—and the battle that Mark Satter had waged before him—was picked up by other local community organizers. Satter introduces us to them one by one. Walking among them is Saul Alinsky, the father of Chicago community organizing; Monsignor John J. Egan, who worked tirelessly for the poor and helped to train and inspire a cadre of young, dedicated Jesuits; and Ruth Wells, a contract buyer turned activist, who put her own home on the line to protest the unfair housing market in Chicago.

The final quarter of the book is dedicated to the founding of the Contract Buyers of Lawndale (CBL), a close-knit community group that eventually hired a team of lawyers and brought their contract-sale cases to trial. Though Satter never says so, it was a class-action suit her father should have been involved in: a high-profile, emotional

showdown between the contract sellers and their prey.

Satter wears the mantle of historian throughout, keeping her emotions in check even when she discusses the members of her own family. It should be noted that when her father died in 1965, the author was only six years old. She has no direct memories of him or of her grandfather. But thanks to one of her brothers, Mark Satter's legacy was preserved in a dozen large scrapbooks.

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### 'Ghetto lending' practices of the 1960s have metastasized.

These scrapbooks, plus Satter's interviews with the large cast of characters, are what give *Family Properties* the density of a good novel. And by means of this exhaustive and exhausting research, the author allows the personalities of the key players to shine. She never backs away from difficult territory, delving into cultural stereotypes of both the African-American and Jewish communities. She also addresses her father's financial ruin, the slums he left behind, and a conservative, controversial article written by her brother David just after Mark Satter died.

At times, the writing slips into legal-speak and academic dryness (Satter is the chairman of the history department at Rutgers University in Newark). But the story itself is so politically and emotionally charged that the book becomes a page-turner, as the reader roots for the underdogs.

Mark Satter's absence during the CBL trials makes the heart ache. But just as in the cases Satter championed, and the fight that King fought in Chicago, the final outcome of the CBL case is heartbreaking. Equally depressing is the fact that many of the local newspapers that covered and championed Satter's battles are either gone or on the verge of

disappearing. The *Chicago Daily News*, in particular, provided much of the first draft of history from which the author drew her tale. A historian writing fifty years from now may have the Internet, but detailed local coverage of events will be sorely missing.

Beryl Satter's story is not without a glimmer of hope, however. Some of the CBL's contracts were renegotiated while the cases wound their way through the courts, saving victims an average of \$14,000 and, more importantly, allowing them to keep their homes. And the press coverage during the litigation alerted the African-American community to the contract sellers' vicious practices.

There are other silver linings, too. The CBL's raw housing data, which had been gathered meticulously by volunteers and lawyers and entered onto rudimentary computer cards, were ruled inadmissible in court at the time. However, the data have since been used by a new generation of community organizers, allowing them to challenge other discriminatory federal housing policies.

And though his name is never mentioned in the text, just around the historical corner is another Chicago community organizer, the most famous since Martin Luther King Jr. marched through Cicero. It's ironic that President Obama's first task in office will not be fighting overt racism, but cleaning up yet another mess that the mortgage industry has left in its wake. (Between 2004 and 2006, the city in America with the most residents holding subprime loans was Chicago.)

In her conclusion, written just before publication, Satter draws direct parallels between the contract sellers of the 1950s and 1960s and the predatory lending practices of the last few years. "'Ghetto lending' practices of the 1960s have metastasized," she quotes one legal scholar as saying. "We are all in the ghetto now." And how will we escape? Before his death, Mark Satter argued that the federal government needed to right its many wrongs by creating "job opportunities for all who would work" through a WPA-like program. It seems to be one argument he may finally win. CJR

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HELENE STAPINSKI is the author of *Five-Finger Discount: A Crooked Family History*.

## Picture Perfect?

*In three new graphic histories, the facts get a visual boost*

BY RICHARD GEHR

NO GREATER DICHOTOMY INFORMS THE history of comics than the seemingly unbridgeable chasm separating Superman, a godlike alien, from his secret identity as mild-mannered *Daily Planet* reporter Clark Kent. At the same time, the journalist and the superhero form a perfect synthesis of observer and observed. Superman performs the sensational feats that Clark Kent subsequently covers on behalf of his paper's readers. As the authentic subject of his own stories, albeit anonymously, Clark Kent is a sort of anticipatory New Journalist.

In an essay collected in *The Contemporary Comic Book Superhero*, Vanessa Russell takes the journalist/superhero dichotomy an intriguing step further. Russell suggests that it's the reporters who transcend mortality in nonfiction comics—specifically, in Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Maus* and Joe Sacco's *Palestine*. "The superhero is superfluous," she writes, "because the reporter, through extensive research, interviews, physical trips to the conflict site, photographs, oral history, and memory work can reproduce a coherent authenticity that mimics a superhero's vision of omniscience."

That may be overstating the case (although at this point, the average journalistic ego needs all the boosting it can get). And the ascendancy of nonfiction comics undoubtedly poses less of an economic threat to mainstream journalism than do Google, Wikipedia, citizen journalism, fake news shows, and blogs unlimited. Yet even a quick flip through journalist Michael Crowley and artist Dan Goldman's *08: A Graphic Diary of the Campaign Trail* reflects what mainstream journalists are up against in the marketplace of attention.

As far as nonfiction comics go, Superman long ago left the supermarket. Which is not to say that transcendent subjects no longer exist. Barack Obama, who combines utopian expectations with his own alien-tinged origins, neatly fills that role for Crowley and Goldman. His dramatic and emotionally satisfying (for most) ascent to the presidency is the already familiar backstory to *08*, condensing the prolific

Crowley's substantially more verbose reportage for *The New Republic*, where he is a senior editor. But without Goldman, an artist deeply in touch with the graphic rhetoric of our time, *08* would be old news, a snooze.

Their collaboration, which began with the Republican rout of 2006 and concluded with Obama's acceptance speech, is written in all-caps headlines and hyperbole. Nuance is sacrificed as we barrel once more through the seemingly endless campaign. "I wanted *08* to draw from both comics and newspapers/magazines in the hopes that someone who'd never read a 160-page comic could pick it up and not feel the room spinning as they tried to navigate the pages," Goldman told the online *Graphic Novel Reporter*. "Using big bold text as design elements throughout (not just as titles) makes it both familiar and chockfull of information."

Comics arguably condense narrative more efficiently than any other medium does, and *08* works that advantage for all it's worth. In this sense, *08* is the talking-points version of Crowley's *TNR* commentary, making it an executive summary even more cursory than *The Week*. That means that the 1,100-word Crowley dispatch filed on March 18, 2008, about Obama's Jeremiah Wright speech can be sufficiently distilled into three panels and the comment, "Yeah, but how will it play in the Rust Belt?" And on that level, the book rocks. But this is hardly the first-person "graphic diary" promised in the subtitle. The authors' conceit is that the campaign is being reported by a pair of clichés: Harlan Jessop, a disheveled geezer akin to Jimmy Breslin, and Jason Newbury, a slick, younger *Times/Post* man. (Lois Lane must have been on maternity leave.) Their interjections resemble blog comments. "They all make asses of themselves sometimes," grunts Jessop at one point. "Romney just takes it to another level."

Goldman cites the usual heavies (*The Boys on the Bus*, *The War Room*, and *Fear & Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72*) as primary influences. Yet *08* essentially pressure-cooks the recycled images and echoing sound bites that define modern political campaigns. And that isn't necessarily an invalid approach. As Evan Cornog (CJR's publisher) and Richard

### **08: A Graphic Diary of the Campaign Trail**

By Michael Crowley  
And Dan Goldman  
Three Rivers Press  
160 pages, \$17.95

### **The Beats: A Graphic History**

Edited by Paul Buhle  
Hill and Wang  
193 pages, \$22

### **Che: A Graphic Biography**

By Spain Rodriguez  
Verso  
106 pages, \$16.95



**Leaping tall buildings** Barack Obama gets the superhero treatment in 08.

Whelan write in their introduction to 08's closest cousin, *Hats in the Ring: An Illustrated History of American Presidential Campaigns*: "[I]mages and symbols of an election are as freighted with meaning, and as 'valid' a political medium, as the more explicitly issue-oriented material inscribed in party platforms and spoken at debates." 08 summarizes the issues and talking points. But even more

significantly, it captures the tsunami of logos, chyrons, photo ops, holograms, and other virtual-reality graphics that enhanced the campaign and election night. It reflects what we've come to accept as adequate campaign journalism: the aggregation of facts endlessly spun, massaged, and repackaged, even as news wells and original reporting shrink.

Historically rooted in caricature (and

politics) as they are, comics always distort what they depict. In this regard, 08 is particularly harsh on Hillary Clinton, while also pointing out how "sexism could be found everywhere." Of course, what national politician doesn't seem a self-parody beside Obama? A metaphysical aura surrounds him in the book's final pages, with his victory speech rendered as an event of cosmic proportions.

This time around, in other words, Superman easily surpasses both Clark Kents. Which means that we miss the keen and sober perspective that might have brought Obama's coronation back down to earth. (No mention is made, for example, of the corporate, union, and PAC contributions that got him to the Senate and made his presidential bid possible in the first place.) But as a deft condensation of this epic campaign, with a finely calibrated ratio of showing to telling, 08 is, like the best superhero comics, a quick, energizing read. It may skim the surface, but that surface is sufficiently fascinating to justify 08 as an alternative to journalism not all that far from its mainstream sources. What it gets perfectly, however, is the *vibe*.

This isn't all we demand of nonfiction comics, of course, but it's harder to pull off than it looks. Some truly stunning graphic biographies employing other strategies have appeared in recent years. Ho Che Anderson delivered a book worthy of its subject with *King: A Comics Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Fantagraphics, 2005). Anderson contrasted dense pages of unadorned black-and-white panels containing the facts of MLK's career with colorful montages conveying its dramatic arc (08 clearly echoes Anderson's innovative use of re-touched photographic imagery). Kyle Baker's *Nat Turner* (Abrams, 2008), on the other hand, recounts Turner's 1831 slave rebellion in virtual silence. Baker eschews word and thought balloons for pages and pages of exquisitely rendered visceral violence to convey the ambivalent catharsis of Turner's rampage.

All of the authors and artists mentioned above emphasize the immediacy and emotional impact of their respective subjects, while hewing close to historical fact. In many ways their work is more like a kind of personal documentary filmmaking than writing. On the other

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hand, graphic renditions of topics relating to the humanities and sciences often remind me of the filmstrips of my youth. Pantheon seemed to reclaim this middle ground between word and image in 1978, when it launched what would become a popular graphic-oriented series with *Lenin for Beginners*.

That spirit persists somewhat in *The Beats: A Graphic History* and Spain Rodriguez's *Che: A Graphic Biography*. Paul Buhle edited both books, and each combines nuts-and-bolts prose with outstanding art. The core of *The Beats* consists of chapters devoted to the big three: Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs. Harvey Pekar of *American Splendor* fame wrote these chapters, which are illustrated by artist Ed Piskor. Several other writers and artists contribute short comic essays on lesser Beats. Joyce Brabner's unabashedly opinionated take on "Beatnik Chicks," Mary Fleener and Pekar's psychedelic meditation on Diane di Prima, and Jeffrey Lewis's collaboration with eighty-five-year-old Tuli Kupferberg (of the Fugs) all evoke their subjects with the kind of loose, manic charm the Beats practically invented.

Pekar, however, seems to find a kindred working-class hero in Kerouac, and occasionally pops into a panel to comment. Pekar is a pioneer of the autobiographical comics trend from which books like *Maus* and *Palestine* evolved, and *The Beats* might have been better served by more of a first-person approach. But the book as a whole suffers from a dearth of quotations from its subjects' work, the material that justifies their fame. David Halberstam made the same mistake in *The Fifties* when he suggested that the lives the Beats led were more important than what they wrote.

And yet, just as the Beats were characterized by relentless linguistic play, *The Beats* manages to make the scene new again on the sheer strength of artistic play. Piskor dispenses with realism altogether, transforming these overly familiar accounts into lurid, EC Comics-worthy pulp fictions. This is a good thing. Piskor rejuvenates the Beats, or at least their collective mythology, via his vaguely menacing depictions of their romantic hookups, artistic frustrations, drug problems, and eventual

rise to legitimacy. His shady yet realistic art provides a skewed point of view that at its best unifies this structurally chaotic overview.

*Che*, on the other hand, opens with Ernesto "Che" Guevara's premature birth in Argentina in 1928. These hundred dazzlingly drawn pages cover Che's medical education, the famous nine-month motorcycle journey that radicalized him, the Cuban revolution, his rocky experience as director of post-Batista Cuba's economy, and his subsequent career as instigator-in-chief, concluding shortly after his 1967 assassination in Bolivia. A biker and radical himself, Manuel "Spain" Rodriguez lent a gritty revolutionary spirit to the first wave of underground comics during the late 1960s. In the pages of *Zap Comix* and alternative newspapers, Rodriguez portrayed superheroic dissidents battling fascist police forces in the dystopic future. Indeed, his best-known character, Trashman, bears a striking resemblance to Che, although Rodriguez has largely steered clear of embellishment.

Rodriguez briefly enters the book himself to recall being a scared and confused kid at the height of the Cuban missile crisis, but *Che* is anything but a first-person account. Like every good biography, it provides context for the more dramatic moments of its protagonist's life's arc, while skillfully manipulating space and time to give the story a richly detailed and almost visceral presence. Che's one-cylinder Norton motorbike has never been so lovingly represented as it is here.

What graphic journalism, biography, and history do best, suggest *O8*, *The Beats*, and *Che*, is convey the aura, emotions, and fuzzier details of lives and events. The better the artist, the better the resulting interpretation will be. Of course, journalists and writers still provided the information from which Dan Goldman, Ed Piskor, and Spain Rodriguez quite literally drew their conclusions. But there's something superheroic about the ability to make those facts soar anew. **CJR**

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RICHARD GEHR lives in Brooklyn and writes "Pulp Fictions," an online column about graphic narratives and comics, for The Village Voice.

## BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

BY JAMES BOYLAN

**Friendlyvision:  
Fred Friendly and the  
Rise and Fall of  
Television Journalism**  
By Ralph Engelman,  
Foreword by Morley Safer  
Columbia University Press  
440 pages. \$34.50

THOSE WHO SAW GOOD Night and Good Luck, the 2005 film about Edward R. Murrow's encounter with Senator Joseph McCarthy, may have come away with the impression that Murrow's producer, Fred Friendly (played by George Clooney), was a quiet, sensible fellow who stayed demurely in the background. Ralph Engelman's full-scale biography corrects that impression in spades. It offers a Friendly more recognizable to those who knew him—a ferocious, always impatient, fissionable mass. He was my colleague, off and on, at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism, and my temptation is to remember the intimidating personality, with its many failures of civility, and to overlook how well Friendly employed this persona to gain his ambitious ends. Possibly fueled by his youth in Providence as a dyslexic and a poor student, he grew up hypercompetitive, first creating a name for himself in the Army during World War II as a tireless roving journalist/lecturer. After the war, he hitched himself to Murrow's star to create the legendary and short-lived See It Now CBS documentary series. As the ailing Murrow's career faded at the network, Friendly



rose to the presidency of CBS News, then the leading brand name in broadcast journalism. Through what may have been his miscalculation, he resigned in a dispute over coverage of the 1966 Vietnam hearings. At that point, he dusted himself off and set up shop at the Ford Foundation, where he helped create public television as we know it, and at Columbia's journalism school, where he was promptly designated the Edward R. Murrow Professor. There he devoted himself to training the young. He always seemed too large for the school, chafing at the smallness of the institution. Quasi-retirement, in 1979, did not stop him. He went on to create a series of television seminars featuring groups of public figures wrestling with public issues; the Fred Friendly Seminars continue to this day, a decade after his death. Yet what his biographer calls Friendlyvision—his concentration on big names, big issues, and national-scale television—now seems an artifact of the twentieth century. Engelman, chair of the journalism department at Long Island University, Brooklyn, devoted a decade of research to creating this

complex, rewarding portrait of one of network television's most memorable figures. The author talked to friends, to enemies, to admirers, and to skeptics. For me, Engelman not only recreates the Fred Friendly I knew decades ago, but adds a private, troubled Friendly I did not.

**Scandal & Civility:  
Journalism and the Birth of  
American Democracy**  
By Marcus Daniel  
Oxford University Press  
386 pages, \$28

MARCUS DANIEL, A SCHOLAR at the University of Hawaii, thinks that the recent spate of books about the nation's founders, concentrating on the familiar roster of dignified statesmen, has not taken seriously enough those whom he calls "the other founding fathers"—the nervy newspaper editors who helped give the new nation its political character, for better or worse. He lines up six of them for our consideration. There is John Fenno of the *Gazette of the United States*; Philip Freneau, poet and editor of the *National Gazette*; Benjamin Franklin Bache, Benjamin Franklin's nephew and editor of the *Aurora General Advertiser*; Noah Webster, lexicographer

and editor of the *American Minerva*; William Cobbett, a Brit and editor of the prickly *Porcupine's Gazette*; and William Duane, successor to Bache at the *Aurora*. All of them were based in the temporary national capital, Philadelphia. They were more or less of a generation, born in the 1750s and 1760s, younger than most of the founders and deeply disrespectful of their elders, including George Washington. As a group, they have often been dismissed by historians as the progenitors of "the Dark Ages of partisan journalism"—a mudslinging interval that theoretically preceded the later dawn of journalistic objectivity. Giving each a detailed examination, Daniel shows that there was more substance to their output than mere partisanship and personal abuse of politicians (although there was plenty of that as well). While the editors lined up as Federalists and Republicans, the early incarnation of our two-party system, they were more like sailors in storm-tossed boats, never knowing where the winds of dispute might blow them. Daniel may fall short of establishing these six as founding fathers—even founding fathers of journalism. Yet there is no question that he affirms their important place in the turbulent politics of the 1790s. CJR

JAMES BOYLAN is the founding editor of the Columbia Journalism Review and professor emeritus of journalism and history at the University of Massachusetts—Amherst.

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A small screenshot of the Columbia Journalism Review website's homepage, showing the main navigation bar and some article thumbnails.

## Luces in the Sky

BY MICHAEL SCHUDSON AND DANIELLE HAAS

WHEN *TIME* MAGAZINE WENT CULINARY trend-spotting in July 1951, it bypassed usual suspects like new ice-cream flavors and found a truly cutting-edge trend: horsemeat for dinner. With beef prices high, butchers were selling hunks of "old grey mare." So the magazine joined the fray and kicked in a cooking tip for pot roast of horse. "The meat tends to be sweet," it observed, so "more onions should be used and fewer carrots."

If the mid-century idea of munching on Mr. Ed sounds unpalatable today, it also points to the general peril of zeitgeist-chasing journalism—namely, that within a few years, the product you tout may become as dated as a recipe for, well, horsemeat. Such perishable press coverage not only risks becoming tomorrow's red face, it can also be dangerous. That's particularly true when it comes to drug coverage, where news breakers risk shouting hosannas to substances that end up bigger health gambles than they initially appeared.

Such was the case with LSD in the 1950s and 1960s, when the hallucinogen was the subject of long, loving stories in *Time* and *Life* magazines, many of which portrayed the mind-bending drug in wondrous terms, according to Miami University (of Ohio) journalism professor Stephen Siff. Writing in the latest edition of *Journalism History*, Siff finds that *Time* and *Life* were hooked on LSD, dedicating more coverage to it than other major newsweeklies, and lacing it all with heavy Christian imagery.

Siff found that articles on LSD in *Time* were both more numerous and longer than those in *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report*. Between its first mention of the drug in 1954 and 1968 (the year Congress criminalized the sale of LSD), *Time* devoted 19,000 words to the drug, almost twice as many as *Newsweek*, and ten times as many as *U.S. News*. In 1966 alone, LSD was the focus of nine *Time* articles, including one that invoked St. Paul's vision of the risen Christ and sixteenth-century St. Teresa of Avila's states of ecstasy.

"Most experiences of mystical consciousness have come only after hard work—spartan prayers, meditation, fasting, mortification of the flesh," *Time* wrote. "Now it is possible through the use of LSD and other psychedelic drugs, to induce some-



**In this column, the authors cull current scholarly writing about journalism for fresh ideas.** Suggestions for possible mention are welcome at [theresearchreport@cjr.org](mailto:theresearchreport@cjr.org)

thing like mystical consciousness in a controlled laboratory environment."

Such divine endorsement, Siff goes on to argue, reflected the personal attitudes of the magazines' publisher Henry Luce and his wife Clare, both of whom used the drug recreationally, believing it had great spiritual and psychological value. That the Luces were tripping through the 1950s and 1960s will surprise many people, although biographers have previously discussed how enjoyable the couple found the drug. And the fact that their psychedelic dabblings apparently infused *Time* and *Life*'s coverage is a sobering, if titillating, reminder that media moguls can influence editorial content more than they're likely to admit.

*Time* and *Life*'s LSD fix is also a reminder of ill-fated journalistic attractions to other drugs that ultimately fell out of social, and sometimes medical, favor. Before Vioxx was withdrawn from the market in 2004 after being linked to thousands of heart attacks, the media failed to follow up warning signs and hailed the painkiller a "super aspirin" (though, in fairness, putting the term in quotation marks).

Journalists face plenty of perils and pitfalls on the pharmaceutical beat. It's not easy to paint a fair portrait of a drug's pluses and minuses through the screen of \$25 billion a year in drug marketing, not to mention various industry "experts" or medical researchers and physicians who may have their own interests to promote and may be on drug companies' payrolls.

Walter Lippmann warned ninety years ago that sometimes the greatest journalistic bias comes from reporters' own "hopes and fears," and no one stands immune to the hope that a new medication can work miracles, whether for Alzheimer's or AIDS or arthritis. The temptation toward early-onset enthusiasm for new drugs is high. But it can have long-term costs in credibility when later and larger longitudinal studies uncover dangers that initial studies missed. **CJR**

MICHAEL SCHUDSON teaches at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism and in the Department of Communication, University of California, San Diego. DANIELLE HAAS is a Ph.D. candidate in communications at Columbia.

# The Lower Case

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(Gloucester (MA) *Daily Times* 12/26/08)

## Community rallies to help massacre survivors

(Los Angeles, CA) *Daily News* 1/3/09

## Israelis find oldest Hebrew writing

Brattleboro (VT) *Reformer* 10/31/08

University of Akron students protest invasion by Israel

Akron (OH) *Beacon Journal* 1/14/09

## Student charged for nude photos

(Eau Claire, WI) *Leader-Telegram* 12/5/08

## Study: Clean air adds to life

(Appleton, WI) *Post-Crescent* 1/22/09

Lawmaker questions prison costs of killing suspect

The Associated Press 12/15/08

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(Corning, NY) *The Leader* 1/13/09

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# TRADEMARK CHECKLIST

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EDITED BY MIKE HOYT, JOHN PALATTELLA, AND THE STAFF OF THE COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

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# Reporting Iraq

AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE WAR BY THE JOURNALISTS WHO COVERED IT

